Flying Snake

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The cat that ate Thomas Hardy`s heart . Shuker on Giant toads . `Dead` woman emerges from coffin . New Hong Kong jellyfish . Cows behaving strangely . Chupacabra as thylacine . Rare marsh fritillary in Cumbria . Orcas attack boats . Djinn . Oddly coloured hen`s egg . Mystery giant salamanders in Europe and Asia . More!

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

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Dr Devo`s Diary

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." Christopher Smart ` `Rejoice in

Welcome to another cocktail of cryptozoology, Forteana and folklore although I must admit that this issue, like previous ones is biased towards cryptozoology. The cryptozoological world beyond Flying Snake has been busy, with what has been promoted as the largest ever hunt for the Loch Ness Monster being continuing since late August 2023. So far (and I am writing this on October 2nd) there have been no conclusive photographs which is rather surprising and disappointing given the proliferation of mobile phones with cameras these days. I have always been a sceptic about Nessie myself but if you, dear reader, would like to submit your opinions as to the existence or otherwise of the Monster please get in touch with me at richyblonde777@gmail.com. But returning to this issue of Flying Snake, we have part 2 of Shane Lea and myself`s exploration of mystery giant salamanders of the world, focusing mainly on Europe and Asia. We also have Dr Karl Shuker`s blog on giant toads, a subject (along with giant frogs) which has always fascinated me. From Loes Modderman we have an essay on the Djinn from the Islamic world and also a fascinating feature on cows behaving strangely. Ulrich Magin, a regular contributor to Flying Snake has contributed a long essay on the monsters of Lake Garda in Italy. In early June whilst down in Salisbury to commemorate the 30th anniversary of my dad`s death I bought an issue of The Wessex Journal which was fortuitous because it had an essay on the strange story of the cat which ate Thomas Hardy`s heart, which I reproduce in this issue of F.S. On the back cover of this issue is a photo taken by Katarzyna Nurkiewicz/Kasia of two moths mating, which I find rather remarkable. I wish all Flying Snake readers a happy Christmas and New Year.

SHUKER NATURE BLOG
ON THE ROAD FOR GIANT TOADS
JANUARY 20TH 2023

Artistic representation of a giant toad (© Richard Svensson)

Today is the 14th anniversary of my ShukerNature blog's official launch (20 January 2009), so now, almost 800 ShukerNature articles later, here is my latest one, to mark this auspicious occasion, and inspired by a fascinating news report that I read just a few hours ago.The news report in question...reveals the recent discovery and capture in Queensland, Australia, of a truly gigantic specimen of cane toad *Bufo marinus* (=*Rhinella marina*). Weighing a colossal 2.7 kg/6 lb (six times that of normal specimens), and dubbed Toadzilla, it may be the biggest toad of any kind ever officially recorded (but keep my use of the word 'officially' in mind, for reasons to be revealed here

shortly).

Native to South America and recognized to be the world's largest toad species, the cane toad was introduced into Australia during the 1930s in a bid to control sugar cane-devouring beetles here. Alarmingly, however, it ultimately proved itself as serious an ecological blight as its intended prey. This is due not only to its skin being toxic but also to various toxin-secreting glands on its back and especially to the pair of very sizeable parotoid glands sited on its warty skin's shoulders, which secrete a potent cardiac toxin called bufotoxin - this highly deleterious suite of secretions collectively causing anything attempting to eat one of these toads to die a swift and usually certain death, including Australia's various native (and mostly endangered) marsupial carnivores, and even creatures as large as goannas (monitor lizards). To make matters worse, this toad also actively preys upon the smaller marsupial carnivore species, such as the shrew-like marsupial mice.

Moreover, because of its very effective deterrent against potential attackers, the cane toad has no predators here, causing its numbers to swell out of all proportion and thereby posing an increasingly severe threat to this island continent's unique indigenous fauna. **A cane toad, with its lethal pair of shoulder-sited toxin-secreting parotoid glands clearly visible (© Froggydarb/Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 3.0 licence)**

Having said that, in recent times one native Australian species, the black-necked ibis *Threskiornis molucca*, has seemingly conceived a remarkable means of side-stepping the cane toad's hitherto unassailable defence mechanism – these ibises have been seen throwing toads in the air, which distresses them, thus inducing them to release their skin glands' toxic secretions, after which the ibises wipe the toads on wet grass or rinse them in a water source, washing off the poison from the toads' skin, and then repeat the entire process, until the toads' glands and skin are eventually drained of toxin, after which the ibises swallow the toads whole, with no resulting ill effects.

Certain other canny avians, such as crows and hawks, have learned to flip the toads onto their back and then devour their internal organs, leaving their lethal shoulder and back glands untouched. Who said that birds are bird-brained?! Anyway, as noted above, the cane toad is officially the world's largest species of toad. Unofficially, however, there may be reason to question this assumption, judging at least from certain intriguing reports contained in the cryptozoological archives.

The native Indian peoples inhabiting various tropical valleys in the Chilean and Peruvian Andes frequently report the existence there of a greatly-feared, giant form of toad called the sapo de loma ('toad of the hills'). It is said to be deadly poisonous and capable of preying upon creatures as large as medium-sized birds and rodents.Science has yet to examine a sapo de loma, but as I have pointed out in my book ***The Encyclopaedia of New and Rediscovered Animals*** (2012) and its two predecessors (***The New Zoo***, 2002, and ***The Lost Ark***, 1993), there is a major precedent for discovering batrachian behemoths in South America. Rolf Blomberg (1912-1996) was a Swedish explorer, photographer, and writer, and in 1950 he was instrumental in bringing to scientific attention a hitherto-undescribed species of giant toad native to southwestern Colombia. He achieved this significant feat by capturing a huge specimen there that he brought back

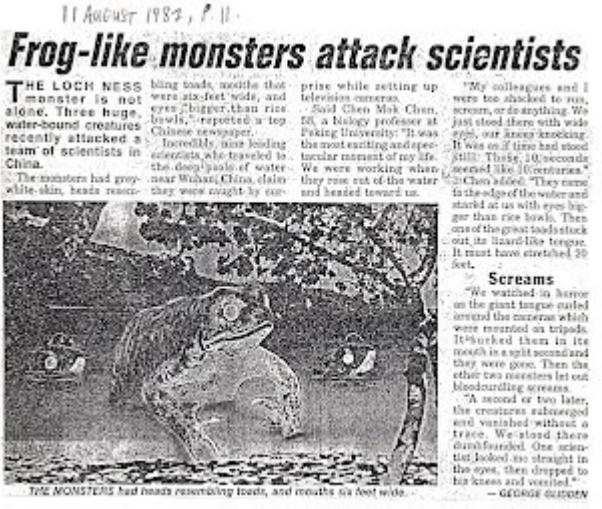
with him to his home in neighbouring Ecuador, and which became the type specimen of this spectacular new species – duly dubbed *Bufo blombergi* in his honour a year later. Blomberg's giant toad (aka the Colombian giant toad) can attain a total snout-to-vent length of up to 10 in, which is greater even than that of the heavier, more massively-built cane toad.

Taxiderm specimen of Blomberg's giant toad *Bufo blombergi* (© Markus Bühler)

Incidentally, German cryptozoological correspondent Markus Bühler has informed me that while browsing through a series of yearbooks from the 1970s for Stuttgart's Wilhelma Zoo, he noticed that the 1971 volume mentioned the chance birth at the zoo some years earlier of hybrids between a female *B. blombergi* and a male *B. marinus*. They were apparently indistinguishable from the paternal species, but exhibited unusually strong growth – no doubt a result of hybrid vigour. Bearing in mind that they were crossbreeds of the world's longest toad species and the world's largest toad species, it is a great pity that the book did not contain any additional information concerning them, because they must surely have had the potential to become veritable mega-toads!

In any event, mindful of the relatively belated scientific discovery of Blomberg's giant toad, it would be rash to rule out entirely the possibility that a comparable species still awaits discovery in remote, rarely-visited Andean valleys not too far to the south of the latter species' distribution range.

Moreover, there are also claims among the Mapuche people relating to a supposedly immense species of toad indigenous to various lakes, lagoons, and irrigation channels in southern Chile and southwestern Argentina. Known as the arumco ('big water frog') in Argentina and and the vilú in Chile, it is said to measure up to 3 ft long. One such creature, dwelling in a lake, reputedly devoured a horse that was attempting to wade across, but whether this story is true or merely native folklore or hyperbole remains unresolved.



11 August 1987, p. 11.

Frog-like monsters attack scientists

THE LOCH NESS monster is not alone. Three huge, water-bound creatures recently attacked a team of scientists in China.

The monsters had grey-white skin, heads resembling toads, mouths that were six-feet wide, and eyes "bigger than rice bowls," reported a top Chinese newspaper.

Incredibly, nine leading scientists who traveled to the deep pools of water near Wuhan, China, claim they were caught by surprise while setting up television cameras.

Said Chen Mak Chen, 58, a biology professor at Peking University: "It was the most exciting and spectacular moment of my life. We were working when they rose out of the water and headed toward us.

"My colleagues and I were too shocked to run, scream, or do anything. We just stood there with wide eyes, our knees knocking. It was as if time had stood still. Then, 10 seconds seemed like 10 centuries."

Chen added: "They came to the edge of the water and stared at us with eyes bigger than rice bowls. Then one of the great toads stuck out its lizard-like tongue. It must have stretched 20 feet.

Screams

"We watched in horror as the giant tongue curled around the cameras which were mounted on tripods. It sucked them in its mouth in a split second and they were gone. Then the other two monsters let out bloodcurdling screams.

"A second or two later, the creatures submerged and vanished without a trace. We stood there dumbfounded. One scientist looked me straight in the eyes, then dropped to his knees and vomited."

— GEORGE GUSSEN

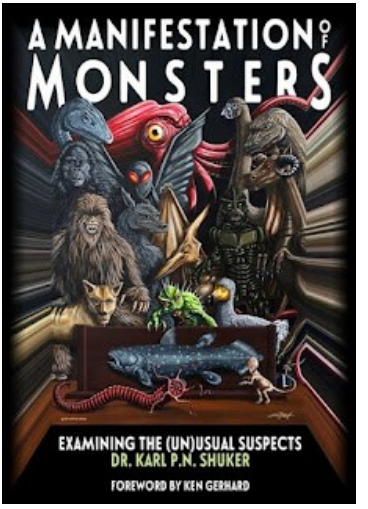
THE MONSTERS had heads resembling toads, and mouths six feet wide.

Unidentified newspaper article published on 11 August 1987, p. 11, regarding the mystery Wuhan giant toads (or frogs?) – please click picture to enlarge for reading purposes (source unknown to me despite many searches for information concerning this article – reproduced here on a strictly non-commercial Fair Use basis for educational/review purposes only)

However, it does remind me of a comparable report that emerged from China. A team of nine scientists from Peking (now Beijing) University, led by 58-year-old biologist Prof. Chen Mok Chun, travelled to some very large, deep mountain pools (one of which is named Bao Fung Lake) near Wuhan in China's Hubei Province during August 1987 in order to film the area and its wildlife. While setting up their television cameras, however, they were allegedly treated to an exhibition of local wildlife far beyond anything that even their wildest imaginations – or worst nightmares – could have conceived.

In full view of the scientists, three huge creatures supposedly rose up out of one of these pools and moved towards the pool's edge nearest to them. Their stunned eyewitnesses likened these grotesque monsters to giant toads or frogs, with greyish-white skins, mouths that were said to be about 6 ft wide, and eyes "bigger than rice bowls".According to Prof. Chen, they silently watched the scientists for a short time. Then one of them opened its huge mouth and swiftly extended an enormous tongue, estimated at 20 ft long, which it wrapped around the cameras on tripods. As it promptly engulfed the tripods, its two companions let forth some eldritch screams, and then all three monsters submerged, disappearing from view. The delayed-shock reaction experienced by the scientists was so great that one of them dropped to his knees and was physically sick, according to Chinese reports, summarised in various overseas media accounts, including an unidentified American newspaper report included here (if anyone can identify its source, please let me know, thanks!)This incident seems so utterly incredible that one would surely feel justified in dismissing it entirely as a hoax of the sensationalist supermarket tabloid kind – were it not for the fact that the eyewitnesses in question were all trained scientists, including a major name in Chinese biological research, and all from the country's leading university. Moreover, reports of such creatures being sighted in this same locality by local fishermen date back at least as far as 1962.For more information concerning mega-toads, not to mention mega-frogs too...be sure to check out my book

A Manifestation of Monsters.



Finally: included here for no reason whatsoever other than I happen to like it is a bizarre sculpture from the late 1800s of a hook-beaked, warty-skinned, rabbit-eared frog – or toad! (© Markus Bühler)

8 COMMENTS: SIMON: I recognise that account of the Chinese giant frogs from somewhere, probably heard it brought up on an old episode of the Centre for Fortean Zoology's web TV series "On the Track".

Dr Karl Shuker: It may have been featured there, but various of my writings introduced it into the cryptozoological community shortly after I received a copy of the newspaper report back in the late 1980s, long before On the Track had begun.

Martin Harris: I remember this story of the giant Chinese toads from the Fate Magazine article "Lesser-Known Lake Monsters" by a certain Dr. Karl P Shuker.
It seems that there are few regions in rural China associated with mythical giant toads. Dr Karl Shuker

Yes indeed, that was the first time that I had documented this report, and it later reappeared in my Fate articles compilation book, From Flying Toads To Snakes With Wings (1997).

Anonymous

A little bit of searching tells me that George Glidden wrote for the "National Examiner," a popular supermarket tabloid. I suspect that's where that story about the Chinese frogs was published. But you'd have to find a copy to be sure, of course.

(Doug Skinner, who has no Google account)

Dr Karl Shuker

Thanks very much for this, Doug. I'd suspected this kind of source for it, but unlike you I hadn't succeeded in tracking down anything for George Glidden. Of course, we still have to take into account that real, named Chinese scientists featured in this article, which I wouldn't have expected it if were a hoax report. Intriguing.

Anonymous

A search turned up a number of George Gliddens, but someone by that name (or pseudonym, probably) was writing for the "National

Examiner" in the '80s, so it's a likely fit. My guess is that he got the story from somewhere else, and then sensationalized it. After all, neither the Chinese scientists nor the frogs were likely to sue.

(Doug Skinner)

The Djinn

Loes Modderman

Recently I read *Legends of the Fire Spirits – Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar*, by Robert Lebling (2010)
It`s not the first book on this intriguing subject that I have read. Some of you might know Rosemary Ellen Guiley's and Philip J.Imbrogno's *The Vengeful Djinn,* which is probably more in tune with Fortean taste.
Lebling's book though has the advantage of being based on thorough research into the Djinn traditions of the Islamic world everywhere. Those traditions turn out to be very diverse from country to country. But they have one thing in common: The Djinn as a species are no way obsolete or pushed back into the realm of fables. The Djinn are as alive as ever, and a force to be reckoned with for the millions who profess to the Qur'an as their guide in life. Mohammed himself believed in the Djinn, and dedicated several Sura's to their character and origin.
But what are Djinn exactly?

According to Mohammed: Angels are made of Light, people are made of clay, and the Djinn are made of 'smokeless fire'.
Their race is very much older than humans, but their lives have much in common with the lives of people. They live in tribes, have families, are born and die, make war with one another, exercise free will and have very distinct characters. They live much longer than we do, and they can shift shape at will, something that we can't. And they can possess humans, if they want to.

The Djinn were not invented by the Prophet. The folklore around them existed a long time before Mohammed entered the scene in the 7th century C.E.
The collection of tales that is called Arabian Nights, or Thousand and One Nights, is full of Djinn. Most date from medieval times when they were translated into Arabic. Possibly many were influenced by much older tales from India.

Although Western interpretation (including some translations of the Qur'an) call them 'demons' or 'devils' , the Djinn are very much varied in their relations to humans. Being jealous of the souls given to us by Allah, some of them aspire for a place in heaven, and a number of them turn to Islam to reach that goal. Fruitless, as it seems.
Others are our enemies, and will do anything to hurt us . Theologically they can be compared to the Judeo-Christian breed of Fallen Angels. Those bad Djinn have an all powerful master: Iblis, who is similar to Satan – haShatan (the Adversary) in the biblical tradition

The Djinn play an important role in the biblical legends of King Salomon, who, as king Suleiman, was integrated in the Qur'an, together with all important biblical figures, including Jesus.
Salomon, a mighty sorcerer, was traditionally master of the Djinn, and exploited them when he built the First Temple in Jerusalem. With his magic ring he controlled Ashmodai, a powerful Djinn master who didn't take well to his enslavement by Salomon. That story is fantastic, as are Jewish legends in general.
Salomon's magic survived far into medieval times, on quasi Hebrew seals and in magical incantations. By then Djinn were transformed into the demons and devils of the Christian pantheon, and they became solely an Islamic matter.

But that doesn't mean that there are not remarkable similarities between Djinn-lore and the lore of the West, especially the Celtic tradition.
For who would think that changelings, a typical Irish and Elvish phenomenon, also happened to be Djinn offspring, found in the cradles of Muslim mothers? Who deal with the cases in the same, cruel way as the Irish mothers used to do?
Robert Lebling writes that '*in the Middle East, changeling stories go back more than four thousand years, to the world's earliest known urban civilisation in ancient Mesopotamia.'*
Some rulers prided themselves on their Djinn blood. Sargon, the mighty ruler of Mesopotamia, and Bilqis, the famous queen of Sheba, were said to be at least half Djinn.

Djinn, being mainly at home in desert-rich countries, take refuge in rocks, ruins and deserted places, while the 'good people' find their

homes in rocks and greener pastures.
It seems that, like Elves, Djinn hate and are afraid of iron, so that's something people keep in mind when they have to navigate Djinn territory.
Some Djinn stand out and cross over in religions. Lilith, the first wife of Adam according to Jewish mythology, spawned thousands of demons and is still feared by young mothers in Middle Eastern societies, Jewish as well as Muslim, for the harm she can do to newborn children. The terror that comes in the night….

But even more interesting than traditional stories is maybe the overlap between modern ET lore and the Djinn.
Since we don't know anything about the real identity and agenda of Aliens, it's not hard to suspect, as some do, that Aliens and Djinn are the same thing. I checked out Jacques Vallee's *Passport to Magonia* , but he doesn't mention Djinn, Nevertheless, everywhere in the Islamic world stories about kidnapping of men, women and children have existed for ages.
The human world and the Djinn society overlap, just like the magical world of fairies brings typical stories to human experience.

What if Djinn are real?
What if they really exist, as millions believe? So many things happen in this strange world that are unexplainable by rational means. What if there are races of non-human beings that are responsible for sightings of Aliens, ghosts, shadowpeople, Old Hags, elves, dybbuks, poltergeists and many more?
Possibly Paul F. Eno is right with his assessment of the 'multiverse' , where dimensions sometimes overlap, allowing other, normally invisible, races to enter our perception?

Cows behaving strangely Loes Modderman

Leeuwarder Courant 22-08-1913

TRANSLATION of the clipping:

On Sunday evening at 5.30 pm , according to the Leeuwarder Courant , which took it from the Algemeen Handelsblad, a reliable Dutch paper, several farmers in the pastures between Muiderberg and Naarden were witness to a strange phenomenon. Suddenly all the cows that were grazing there lifted their heads up to the sky in one direction , and then ran, tails in the air, most likely scared, in the other direction. As far as one could see, the same happened in all pastures at the same moment. A dog also made the same movements. No aircraft of any kind, balloon or anything that could have spooked the animals was in the vicinity. Maybe the same thing was observed elsewhere, and then the explanation would have to be looked for in the atmosphere. The farmers had never seen something like this before.

Een vreemd verschijnsel.

Zondagavond te halfzes is, naar het „Hdbl." meldt, door verschillende veehouders in de weiden tusschen Muiderberg en Naarden een vreemd verschijnsel waargenomen. Plotseling staken alle koeien, die daar graasden, haar koppen naar één richting omhoog en renden daarna met opgeheven staarten, schijnbaar angstig, in tegenstelde richting weg.

Zoover men kon zien, geschiedde in alle weiden gelijktijdig hetzelfde. Ook een hond maakte dezelfde bewegingen. Geen vliegmachine of luchtballon of iets anders, dat de dieren kon verontrusten, was in de nabijheid. Misschien is elders dit verschijnsel ook opgemerkt, dan zou de verklaring in de atmospheer moeten gezocht worden. De veehouders hadden zoo iets nog nimmer bijgewoond.

(In those days there were a LOT of cows in Dutch pastures !)

This brought back memories of what happened somewhere in the 90ties, when many monkeys (mantle baboons) in the ZOO in Emmen (Drente Province Netherlands) were collectively so scared of something invisible that they stayed in the trees for days, not coming down to eat and impossible to be convinced to come down from the trees. After several days they reluctantly did, one by one, but the same thing happened a few years later, also without visible cause. No other animals were affected, as far as I know.

THE MONSTERS OF LAKE GARDA

Ulrich Magin

I had come to Italy's Lake Garda especially to look for its monster, but I hadn't expected to see it so soon. On the very first day, standing at the southern end of the town of Garda's lake front, the cliffs of the rock which gave town and lake its name towering behind my back, I was suddenly confronted with a black dragon-like creature with a horse's head and body, a serpent's or dinosaur's tail, three-fingered arms and feet, and mighty bat's wings. It seemed unreal, almost transparent. And so it was. It was a sculpture by Felice Naalin, actually, commemorating the beast's most famous appearance, in August 1965, in front of local fishermen and tourists. Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake, for many is the first taste of Italy, and of the south. The German poet Goethe certainly felt so, and exalted on the natural beauty of it.

Each year, mainly German, British and Dutch tourists visit these blue waters, and with the steep cliffs in the northern half, which make the lake look just like a Norwegian fjord teleported into the Mediterranean, and the soft hills of the south which roll into the plains of the Po, there is much to see and admire, including Roman ruins of a size you hardly find elsewhere. The lake is 52 km long and 17 km wide at its widest point. It is also a deep lake, 136 m in average, but reaching an abysmal 346 m at its deepest point. The shores are dotted with romantic villages and the ruins of medieval castles and ancient Roman villas, and the beaches are full of holiday-makers. The lake is almost always filled with boats, sailing boats, yachts, and surfboards. Ferries cross the lake, both for cars and passengers. Hardly a minute goes by without someone looking at its waves, diving in it, or crossing it in a vessel. But I had not come solely for a vacation. I had come to the lake Garda to research its monster, and was familiar with the incident the sculpture referred to: On 17 August 1965, a fisherman reported that he had seen a 10m, or 33 ft, giant animal surfacing near Punta San Vigilio in the Baia delle Sirene, the Bay of the Mermaids, just just north of Garda town. The creature had a large head, but was

called a “plesiosaur” by the press anyway. Then 30 persons, among them German, English, and Italian tourists, as well as an American visitor, Camille Finglet, saw the creature too. They said it was 10 m long, had a diameter of 20 cm, and four humps. The creature was brown moved across the lake in undulations. A few days later, it was seen on the opposite shore,

near Gardone. Luigi Malfer, a fisherman, wondered where it had come from, as he knew of no tradition. He added, however, that a “mysterious predator” seemed to have eaten five kilogrammes of Sardelles in the Bay in the last month. Other fishermen told reporters their nets had been torn as if “by the sharp teeth of a predator.” Closely tracked by the national Italian press, ten armed divers went searching for the creature for several days, but came back empty handed – perhaps for the better when you remember what happened to the nets.

(1) **Monstrous legends**

As might be expected from a land of mysterious, deep water, and high, snow covered mountains, there are legends about dragons. A folktale of uncertain age tells of one slaughtered at a Lazise quarter called Mondragone, dragon’s mount, on the southern end of Lake Garda, and the town sports a winged dragon in its coats of arms. One of the earliest German epics, the Wolfdietrichlied, speaks of a sinister Saracen magician who brought dragon eggs to Garda to have the monstrous offspring terrorise the land and the castle (they loved good propaganda against Islam even then!). But, even in more recent times, in chronicles, we read about monstrous beings in the lake. In 1599 author Bongiani Grattarolo said there were monsters in a cave below Isola Borghese, modern Isola di Garda: „Some scholars wanted to find out how deep the water was (which legend claimed was immeasurably deep), and let down a plumbline, which a diver should follow. When the line was rolled down almost completely, the diver was sent in. He almost died of fright, because he saw certain fish in a dark cave under the island, or certain excessively large monsters. Also the brothers (of the monastery) noticed these monsters underwater in very hot weather,

and were so frightened that they never returned to this very spot.“ Tales like this one are told of many lakes in continental Europe. But it is not only medieval Bush-like propagandists and monks who tell of monsters at Lake Garda. Sometimes, even today, an unaware tourist makes a disturbing discovery. Take “chrisst” for example, a Dutch woman on holidays at Cisano. On 29 August 2007, she wrote in a travel forum of her country: “I saw something far out on the lake, further than the middle of it. We were at Cisano. I said I believed someone had said that something lived here like the Lochness monster. My husband said that it must have been a boat. But, well; he hadn’t seen it … It came above the surface of the water and went down a little further on, and then up again. It was amazing I saw it only once. It didn’t put me off from swimming, as it was really far away. It must have been a very large snake.“ (2)

When American troops reached the lake in 27 April 1945, they encountered the beast. We can be certain they scanned the lake for enemy craft, possibly even submarines (one, on dry land, had been discovered on the lake shore, ready for action, only a few days before). Dolly from Australia had this to say about a tale her father told her about World War II: “My father swears that in the deep crystal coolmountainous lake called Lake Garda in Italy, during world war 2, he and 3 army soldiers were in a canoe on a still summers night when all of a sudden something really large made a gigantic wave almost tipping their boat over. Scared, they quickly rowed back to shore. The next day an elderly italian villager told dad there were several large creatures living in the cool mountain lakes.” (3)

More monsters

The 1965 incident, easily the most famous monster sighting in the lake, was turned into a Blair-Witch-Project-style video by Andrea Torresani 40 years later. Torresani, a Garda journalist and artist, explained his work was an exploration of the fears and legends of the lake. The movie depicts two modern journalists who come across some old photos of the initial witness from 1965, then mount a boat to

find out more, get lost on Lake Garda and finally, when they are almost hysterical, are confronted by strange movements on the surface. The video, masking as documentary, premiered on 16 December 2004 in Garda and was subsequently shown in many of the towns along the lake. An edited version can be seen on the internet. The Baia delle Sirene sighting which inspired Torresani is not only the most famous, it was also practically the first sighting made – and this despite the fact that the lake shores have been densely settled since Roman times, and we have almost 2000 years of documents on the lake.

Yet, with the exceptions already noted, nothing was seen until 1965, and then nothing again until a German girl, aged 11, observed a Komodo monitor lizard in an olive grove in the summer of 1987. She later became a practicing witch later and thought it might have been a beast from another plane of dimension. She told of her encounter in November 2006 in a German internet discussion board: „As I took a stroll one evening at sunset, it stood before me. I did not know what it was, and I was simply afraid. Although the animal was not too large, yet ... I was 11 at the time, and it was as high as my hip. It was a large reptile. The colour … oscillated between green and red.“ (4) This was on land. On the afternoon of August 15, 2001, two professional divers from Marano Lagunare in Udine province on vacation at the lake came across a monster fish while at a depth of 29 meters off Gargnano, on the western banks of the lake. “We have seen bigger fish, but this one had us emerging real fast.” Alan and Henry Brocchetta, the divers, explained. “We have seen hundreds of dolphins and tunny, even larger and more dangerous fish. But this one was exceedingly large. Nearly five meters.“ Alan said he had come across the monster first. „I encountered this large dark form. I at first thought it was a car wreck. I directed the flashlight at it, and realized it was a catfish. I came up as fast as possible and alarmed my friend.“ When both returned to the encounter site, the fish was gone. Pierluigi Terzi, who owns a restaurant in Gargnano, confirmed to the local newspaper “Brescia Oggi“ (5) that “when they returned to the surface, the two

divers were absolutely shocked from their encounter with the enormous fish." On the next day, boats went out, in the vain hope of catching the beast, but it had gone, and no trace of it was ever found. European catfish can grow up to 10 ft in length, and individuals measuring 3 ft have reliably been observed in the lake, but even a 10 ft catfish will not look like a volkswagen in volume. Most observations in Lake Garda have been reported only after the 1965 incident was rediscovered by the local press in 1999, and Andrea Torresani made his video. If you go to YouTube, you will find two tapes allegedly taken of a Lake Garda monster. Both are short, out of focus, and show little more than boats in the distance. One was uploaded on February 19, 2007, and supposedly filmed in the previous winter, the second early in June 2007. It is even briefer, obviously shows a yacht, and the only information available is that it had been taken „a short time ago." We can safely conclude that local pranksters, encouraged by the success of Torresani's video, made their own silly shots. However, in September 2006 the fisherman Domenico Pozzani was on the lake in the secluded Bay of Garda when he spotted a movement in the water. Then bubbles appeared, and a giant dorsal fin cut the surface. This is but one of several sightings Torresani, obviously the focus for those interested in the monster, received. In June 2007, he told me that he had heard of an anaconda which someone had seen off Bardolino. All these sightings happened more or less in the immediate vicinity of the 1965 observation. Needless to say, despite ten days in Garda, and visiting each individual site, I saw nothing but water. But it is not only my own bad luck that argues against a real monster in the beautiful area. There are two problems with a real-life Lake Garda monster. First, everybody seems to see something different – an anaconda is not a Volkswagen-sized catfish, nor does it resemble a plesiosaur. Second, as Lake Garda is a tourist hotspot, and has been continually settled for at least 6000 years, and has continually been observed and written about since Roman times, a real, giant animal ought to be a little more often seen than it actually was, and still is. Whenever I asked local people whether

they knew anything about the monster, they said they hadnever heard of it and were not aware of there being traditions and sightings. Some sites on the internet even accuse Torresani of promoting a monster for his own sake. I think this judgement is unfair: Andrea Torresani is a visual artist and a film maker deeply interested in the legends of his lake. He wrote a very interesting book on the tale of the lost city of Benacus, separating fact from fiction. His promotion of the Garda monster is, I feel, a poetic statement, an attempt to reenchant the lake. Also, there have been reports well before he made his movie, and sightings have been reported completely independent of his own promotional activities such as the American report. So far, they haven't yet caught on. But give time, and we'll see. There is certainly no dearth of sightings to support the concept that Lake Garda has a Nessie once it takes wings. And yet, despite all the reports and experiences … Plesiosaurs, anacondas, Komodo monitors, the obligatory giant catfish, dragons – like many lakes where there does not yet exist a fixed stereotype about how the local monster should look, Lake Garda houses a large menagerie of strange creatures. No real animal would appear in so many guises.

The modern monster

Andrea Torresani has continued to promote a monster in the lake, writing a book, filming a movie and posting many youtube videos, among them explained cases that he mystified. Much of the new material I owe to his efforts but he infected many new enthusiasts.

- In April 2012, a research team of the group Toscolano Deep Explorers, headed by Angelo Modina, found an image on their sonar which resembled a serpent on the bottom. In November, he launched an expedition for the creature. (L'Arena 20 November 2012, also BresciaOggi, same date) By that time, the monster had received the nickname Bennie.
- * On 28. November 2012, the newspaper BresciaOggi enthusiastically reported that it had "rained reports" and "amazing sto-

ries in snowball effect": "Now everyone seems to have seen the monster of Lake Garda: some from the shore, some from a boat, and there's even one who has seen it from the road 45 bis as he drove a truck. […]We cannot longer count the sightings reported by our readers, the map of sightings is full of flags." One sighting was reported by Walter C. "Saturday, October 20 [2012], taking advantage of the good weather, we sailed very early in the morning from the port of Dusano Manerba with some friends toward the promontory of San Fermo, to do some troll fishing. Suddenly I witnessed a scene that shocked and terrified me. In a distance of less than 20 feet the water began to boil terribly, and I saw the appearance of what I might describe as a head and neck twisting, which made a slight arc on the surface, then it sank again pushing up a large mass of water. Theappearance and dimensions were shocking." Walter C. reckoned the head to be about 40 cm long and the neck a meter and a half, both were brown and slimy. "It looked like a giant snake or a long neck. I was literally frozen with fear for several minutes." Another report came from a lorry driver from Riva del Garda who was walking northerly along the road "45 bis" at the height of Gargnano "some time ago when he momentarily saw "a large, nondescript animal" rise to the surface.

- On 1 December 2012, Brescia Today, an internet news platform, had further sightings to report: A woman from Bogliaco declared she had seen, near San Felice, a big turtle emerge from the water, while a lorry driver said he had seen, accompanied by his family, a monster from the Gardesana highway.
- * The Corriere del Garda (1 December 2012) had still more recent sightings: "Ms Aiga Wenther of Toscolano reported having seen the giant head of Bennie surface in front of San Felice, and then dive back with his huge bulk in the waves." – "A fisherman from Garda saw it swimming in front of the Villa Canossa. A tourist saw it move beneath the surface in the area of Campione. A diver saw a huge animal on the Venetian [i.e. eastern] shore."

- Antonio Spallanzani, a 67 year old retired man, fond of diving and spearfishing, wrote to the newspapers (the story was printed both in L'Arena and BresciaOggi for 7 December 2012) that he saw the monster in 2000 while diving in Lake Garda. He said it was of an unknown species, gigantic, weighed one hundred pounds, and he shot it in the face with a spear gun. * BresciaOggi, 24 December 2012: "A few days ago, we got a new and exclusive testimony, dated to the summer 2011, the same period in which a group of tourists saw something strange at Padenghe sul Garda, and rushed to the local authorities to report what had emerged from the waters. The last witness report we received is far more precise and detailed, and we give it as told to us by Rebuschi Fabio and Matteo Galbassini, two guys in their thirties who live in Desenzano del Garda. The time was-June 2011, on a Saturday afternoon. / 'We were not very far from the shore, and we stopped between Portese and Manerba', the guys report. 'With a little surprise we realized that something was wrong: just a few steps from the boat we saw a sort of large shadow, a dark spot but very large. In panic we were petrified, we got scared. We then made our minds up and we realized that it could only be an animal, apparently longer than our own boat.' / The boat in question is a RIO 400, which reaches and exceeds 4.50 meters in length."
- * On 23 January 2013, Italian TV broadcast a show on the monster. (L'Arena 25January 2013) After it, on the Yahoo questions and answers site, early in December 2012, someone inquired whether anybody had seen the monster mentioned in the newspapers. Alex/Alessandro answered: "I've seen something strange really, seven years ago, in March [2005], in the evening. I was windsurfing in front of Campione [on the western shore], in the middle of the lake, on the upper Garda. For a second or two, maybe three, I saw a dark mass that seemed to be of a greenish-brown colour, glistening in the sun. It was over two meters long, emerged a few inches and it was

only a part, the rest was underwater. Then it dove, raising a small wave." (http://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?d=20121205025927AALLYrN)

* The Corriere della Riviera magazine from Garda, for April 2013 carried a report: on a new photo of a surface disturbance and a new anonymous report, a large serpent on the shore and a catfish in the lake that were actually caught. The new sighting was by Stefano M.M. who, at the end of August 2012, between 22:30 and 23.:30, and located somewhere between Baia and Brancolino, spotted "a dark mass", two metres in length and 25 to 30 metres from the shore, in the surface of the lake which soon went below water. It resembled a hump or a log. August 31 was a full moon, so this part of the story checks out.

* In Germany, state channel ZDF broadcast a documentary on the monster on October 20, 2013. They had invited me as expert, but only if I said that the creature was an 8 m eel. I declined.

* L'Arena, 23 October 2013: "In August this summer I received a call from a sportsman, a person who has been windsurfing and kite surfing for thirty years and therefore knows every nuance of the lake Garda. He called to say he had just left the water at Malcesine when he and his friends saw a dark mass in the lake. At first they thought it was algae, but then they saw that waves broke against this 'spot'. It appeared solid, 'like the back of a hippo.' After the initial amazement had faded, he tried to photograph it with his cell phone, but by then the 'spot' had gone."*

* At http://www.youreporter.it/video_AVVISTAMENTO_DI_UN_PESCE_MOSTRUOSO_NELLA_BAIA_DELLE_SIRENE is a 10 minute video showing the interrogation of a witness by Andrea Torresani. Marina Gelmetti and her 9-year-old son Manolo of Garda, a town at the lake's eastern banks, were at the Baia delle Sirene in late August (other sources say early September 2013) a local beauty spot, when their car broke down. The boy went

outside to have a look. Suddenly, there was a strange "movement" in the lake and the water began to boil. Then a huge, dark, 14-15 metres-long "snake fish with the head of the sperm whale" appeared and sank below the waves, too quick to be photographed. "It had the tail of a snake and a big head like that of a sperm whale. Due to its size it could not be missed, and I immediately called my mother so that she could see it." Mum grabbed her cell phone to photograph it and then ran to her son. "But I had time only to see one wave and a dark spot. It appeared like a diver, but was much longer. I looked to see if there were boats or ferries its surroundings. There were none and the wave was not coming toward the shore, but it went left to Garda." The boy drew a kind of tadpole with the box-like head of a sperm whale, trailing two arches behind.

- The newspaper BresciaOggi tells us on 15 March 2014, designer Roberto Zanchi, of San Felice, has produced and now offers t-shirts and baseball caps with a long serpent swimming in lake Garda with the word Bennie on it.
- On an Italian website which reported on the German TV documentary, Matthias Würz, a German reader, posted his own, previously unrecorded sighting on 4 April 2014: "We have seen a large unknown animal in Lake Garda in October 2013 when we stayed in Riva [at the extreme north of the lake] on holidays. It could be clearly discerned on the water's surface and had the form of several loops above the water which moved forward. We though this were marine divers who at the time were salvaging the wreck of a helicopter." (http://codelmontepadule.com/2014/04/la-tv-tedesca-zdf-commissiona-uno-speciale-su-bennie-il-mostro-del-lago-di-garda/#comments)

* Alessandro Bertarini and Davide Berti saw, in March 2014, at Bardolino, a 2.5 m giant fish shape moving in the shallow water, and took an image. (Corriere della Riviera, April 2014, p. 10; film on:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgRa3ZCK8KQ

* A monster museum was established in the restaurant “883” in Garda, San Bernardo Street (L’Arena 19 November 2014). * On 24 May 2015, in the morning, 22-year-old Edoardo Castaldelli from Cecina, a quarter of Toscolano Maderno, saw and photographed what he doesn’t want to call “monster” but is willing only to call something he saw. “After 10 in the morning I looked out the window to take a photo of the lake with my phone, to be sent with WhatsApp to my friends. As I looked in the frame and snapped, I suddenly saw a‘ thing’ as big as a boat coming out of the water, and after a while it sank and disappeared from view, but it remains in the picture. […] After I had taken the image, there was nothing in that stretch of the lake, no boat, not even remotely, no nothing. […] It appeared out of nowhere and collapsed in a minute.” Angelo Modina said the monster could be measured at 20 m / 70 ft long, newspapers voiced the opinion it was just a wave.* Either on 12 March 2015 or in July 2014, an “incredible and strange creature was found beached on the shores of Lake Garda [near Salo]. The strange animal measures little more than a meter and a half, with some greyish spots all over the body which resemble scales: it recalls a pliosaur. The discovery was made by a young Ethiopian immigrant, Edwin Shalab, who fishes for sturgeon every morning to sell them at Rovereto fish market. […] The mysterious animal was transported to a University and the strictest silence was imposed.” (http://notiziepericolose.blogspot.de/2014/07/lago-di-garda-immigrato-trova-pliosauro.html) The report is complete with a good Photoshop image of a young plesiosaur in the hands of the fisherman. * In the Trip Advisor forum, user Peter Fabián (who posts as petfab) wrote on 28 September 2015 under the headline: “Loch Garda Monster?”: “On 12.9. near Malcesine we have noticed a bit strange creature’s head above the water.” * “Two strange shapes in motion have been captured by a Rov, small underwater robot equipped with an electronic scanning sonar device for the inspection of the lake’s bed. – The images come from the lake bed off Manerba and really surprises: two moving figures in the shape of fish, with lots of side fins and gills. The largest, measured by the computer, is about 7 meters long, the smaller less.

Sculpture of the monster—see p. 13

They appear side by side. – This sighting dates back to last week, says Angelo Modina." (BresciaOggi 27 January 2016) * Clara Butturini was bathing in the lake between Torri and Pai when she and a friend, Patrizia Di Lorenzi, noticed two humps close by each other which emerged from time to time only a few yards from the banks. She informed local monster researcher Andrea Torresani who put her testimony on You Tube. We have seen two' aligned' things, about half a meter long, similar to two humps … They went straight ahead several

meters south, in the direction of Torri and Garda. They proceeded rather slowly and steadily, with a strange tranquillity. When I saw this 'thing' I tried to observe it closely. I was standing in the lake, the water reached my knees. It was about five meter from me. The two shadows that came out of the water formed many bubbles." The humps did not move in a linear way: "The pace was always slow. But at some point I noticed that there was a moored motorboat in the trajectory of this 'thing' that continued to move in the water. When in front of the boat, the two humps made a detour as if to avoid the obstacle. We were really impressed with what we saw. It was very strange." The witnesses ruled out that they had seen divers or snorkelling enthusiasts or nutrias. "On the day of sighting the beach was crowded with bathers. Many noticed the strange form in the water but no one knew what it was. Maybe a big fish or who knows what else. Certainly, in the decades I have come to the lake, I have never seen such a thing. I did not go out of the water to take the phone and snap some photos. But there was a guy who photographed that strange thing." Torresani's video reached 1700 views within hours. There was a video of a strange eddy in May, and in August a strange "spot" was seen off Garda. (L'Arena 23 September 2017; Giornale di Brescia 4 October 2017)

* In October 2017, German bus tour operators offered monster trips to search for Bennie. (BresciaOggi, 22 October 2017) * In 2018, British TV person Jeremy Wade made his expedition to look for Bennie and concluded it was a gigantic catfish. (Giornale di Brescia, 4 October 2018) And, strangely enough, there have been no new sightings of Bennie since 2017. But a new outbreak will come as sure as spring follows winter.

Not only monsters

Lake Garda is mentioned in Dante's Divine Comedy and by Nostradamus in his Centuries. It is full of other mysteries and legends besides monsters – all in accordance with what the French folklorist Michel Meurger has called the mythological landscape. We learn that Lake Garda is connected to the other great lakes of the region by under-

-ground tunnels. We learn that it has great eddies called Sórbe which can swallow ships. People have observed Monte Baldo, on the eastern shore, to erupt, although it is no volcano. There is talk about sudden rises of the lake level, like floods. We learn that on its floor lies a great sunken Roman city, Benacus, from which the Italian name of the lake, Benaco, is derived. Other towns are rumoured to have been swallowed by the blue waters as well. (6) Islands appear and vanish in the lake. Mothman has been spotted several times close to its western shores. We read about sightings of tatzelworms and giant monitor lizards in the mountains that rise above the lake. People see flying saucers dive into the water or come out of it. There are several observations stored on the fantastic waterufo.net website by Carl Feindt. There were rumours, in World War I, of a secret submarine deployed there by theAustrians. As the New York Time wrote on August 14, 1915: "It is useless to say that no dreadnought has been launched upon the blue waters of the Lake of Garda, but there has been great and terrified talk in the fishermen's hamlets about a submarine which was to bring death and desolation to them. But this remarkable and ghostly craft never emerged and ceased to be believed in." (7) As for USOs, the most recent case was a sighting by Teresa Silvestri of a "red moon" which rose from the lake on 2 August 2008 off Gardone Riviera and drifted away in the sky towards Portese-San Felice (8). Experienced investigators will quickly see that this was just a Chinese lantern, an impression later confirmed. (9)

Facts and fantasy So some of these legends are based on rumours or war nerves, like the secret submarine, others on misperceptions. Still others are based on fact. There are strange currents in the lake (the 19 th century scientist Georg von Martens spoke about one being visible "like the river Po" on the surface), and underwater springs, some of which are hot, are still being discovered by divers. A natural thermic lake lies just outside Lazise. Caves linking mountains on the shore with the lake bottom have been found. (10)And there are actually natural phenomena which will look completely inexplicable to the layman. The sudden rises of the lake's level are a fairly common metro-

-logical phenomenon called seiches (where, due to air pressure, the whole body of a lake surges, giving the impression of ebbs and tides), and also to tsunamis triggered by underwater landslides. I have collected more than 20 instances when such massive waves washed the shore, sometimes catastrophically so. For example, an enormous seiche was reported in January 1787 (11), in 1836 a landslide of Monte Tomè made the water rise and fall violently (12), during the strong earthquake of May 22, 1868, "the water in the lake rose, and considerable waves rolled onto the coast." (13). In July 1881 another earthquake made the lake "well" between Bardolino and Pai (14), while, during the quake of 7 June 1891, Lake Garda rose and fell in the Bay of Saló.(15) In May 1951, "Lake Garda trembled violently, while a huge wave swept across it." (16), and in May 2001, the level of the lake suddenly rose by one metre, then sank again, flooding the whole beach of Riva, dislodging ships and piers. (17) During the earthquake of Saló, on 24 November 2004, waves up to five metres in height raced towards the north across the lake. (18) These seiches might coincide with other phenomena. Some July before 1928, a German scientist called Schmucker heard the lake sigh, then the water surface rose and sank. (19)Sometimes, these incidents made headlines even in American newspapers:

"LAKE HAS TIDE. Lake Garda, Italy, Sept. 13 (AP).—Considerable mystification has been aroused among natives and tourists frequenting this famous Italian resort by the observation that Lake Garda, the largest of Italy's inland bodies of water, has developed a tide. It has been ascertained that the water rises slightly more than one foot and then falls with fairly accurate regularity. It is believed the tide is caused by gaseous springs that have their source in the bottom of the lake, because it has been noticed that as the tide recedes great portions of the lake's surface are covered with fine bubbles. At first it was thought that's submarine volcanic action was the cause; indeed, scientific observers have not as yet abandoned this theory as a possibility. But the effervescent spring explanation is considered more plausible." (20) It is not difficult to imagine such an event triggering the fears of the

American soldiers at the end of World War II. Even the newspaper invents a mythical explanation for a simple seiche. But seiches can't create plesiosaurs. You must know about them, and about the possibility that they may still live in lakes, before you experience a seiche and then tell your grandchildren about a monster. **The lake is a mirror**

There is enough strange stuff going on in lakes, some of which is scientifically understood, like seiches or tsunamis, that may be interpreted, in folklore or by actual witnesses, as a lake monster. And will such surges of water not inspire stories that they carried away a city into the depths? Is this why we find stories of lake dragons always when there are also stories about sunken cities? Are the dragons the guardians of these lost homes? We know about boat wakes, swimming deer (not uncommon on the Italian lakes), drifting logs. But the reaction these stimuli create depends on ideas that are older than the actual perception of the witness, concepts they already know before they even see something mysterious. The stimuli trigger memories of monsters, they do not create them. As Fort noted, all things are interconnected, even tales that are told about large bodies of water. One myth explains another – the tunnels tell you why the dragon is not seen more often (gone away for holidays in another lake), the sunken city makes clear that these depths are horrible. The strange currents explain the sightings of monsters – or monsters create strange currents when they swim hidden below the surface. Lakes are mirrors that reflect our hopes, fears, and fantasies. Deep, impenetrable, they may house many things we do not even suspect. We cannot penetrate the surface with our eyes. And we have a tendency to see what we can't see as monstrous, and populate these lakes with fantastic creatures. The American poet James Wright (1927–1980) knew this. In 1970, he went to Sirmione, the birthplace of the poet Catull on the lake's southern banks, with his wife, Anne. In her memoirs, she remembers: "The best time of writing for James was at Sirmione on Lake Garda. (…) Instead of sitting on the shore of the lakeside beach, James would walk far out on an underwater shelf of rock, stand waist-high in the water, arms folded across his chest, and look at the quiet towns on the opposite

shore. (…) The water beyond was deep and dark. We loved to swim in that place but confessed we both had the same impression that a fierce monster lived far beneath the rock. (…) At the foot of the cliff [on which a Roman villa stands] is a swimming area with a huge slab of limestone for a beach. We'd spread our towels on the rock and wade in the shallow waters. (…) We felt safe from the imagined lake monster so close to the haunts of Catullus." (21)It seems every lake has the potential for a monster, and all we need do is to be perceptive, or poetic, enough to see it!

Notes

1. Simona Cremonini: Leggende, curiosità e misteri del lago di Garda. self published, 2009, p. 50

2. http://www.gardameer.com/gardameer_forum/11_368_0.html)

3. The Unexplained, Topic: Loch Ness Monster, 10 February 2007 www.chatalot.net/php/viewtopic.php?t=2713&start=0&sid...

4.http://www.hexenzirkel.org/html/modules.php?name=Forum&action=printpage;topic=1380.0

5. Brescia Oggi 18 August 2001

6 There is one off San Vigilio, (L'Arena, 5 January 2009), at the end of the 19th C., Don Conforti, the village priest of Gargnano, reported of a town sunk into the lake near San Giacomo di Cali (Bresciaoggi, 19 December 2006); and there are allegedly the ruins of a Roman Villa 40 m from the shore at Toscolano Maderno (Brescia Oggi3 August 2006)

7 Willy G. R. Bendictus: Two Tyrol Fronts In Unique Warfare, New York Times, 14 November 1915, p. X6)

8 BresciaOggi, 5 August 2008, p. 29. 9 BresciaOggi, 6 August 2008, p.32

10 L'Arena, 3 January 2007; L'Arena, 5 June 2009

11 Tullio Ferro: Il lago si racconta. Geografie e storie del Garda. Mantova, Sometti,

2005, p. 23 Benaco – Un' Atlantida perduta nel Garda

12 A. Torresani:. 2002, p. 24

13 Sergey L. Soloviev, Olga N. Solovieva et al.: Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Sea

2000 B.C.-2000 A.D. Kluwer Academic Publishers 2000, p. 110

14 Ferro: il lago, p. 60

15 Bollettino della Societá di Naturalisti, Napoli, vol. xxiv, 1911, p. 327

16 Canberra Times 17 May 1951

17 Onda anomala spazza il lago. Alto Adige 3 May 2001

18 BresciaOggi 6 March 2005

19 Der Naturforscher. Hugo Vermühler Verlag, vol. 5, 1928, p. 139

20 Herald-Journal, 12. September 1925)

21 Anne Wright: Many Waters. in: Frank Graziano and Peter Stitt: Frank Wright: A Profile. University of Michigan Press, 1990, p. 117

From The Wessex Journal January/February 1996

Spit and Sawdust by Frank Smyth

The cat that ate Hardy's heart

Oh strange interment! Civilised lands afford few types thereof. . .

"My Late Husband" Thomas Hardy.

I SHALL break all the rules of narrative and give you the punchline first. The heart of Thomas Hardy was eaten by a cat. No, on second thoughts, I shall spell it out for you, for such a solemn subject begs precision. On the afternoon of Monday 16 January 1928 a casket was buried in the churchyard of St Michael's, Stinsford, near Dorchester, which contained the body of a cat, with the remains of Thomas Hardy's heart inside it.

You don't believe a word of it? Nor did I when I first heard the strange tale from Betty Allsop during Sunday lunch in Kensington twenty-odd years ago.

Betty's husband, Kenneth Allsop, the writer and broadcaster, had died at their home in West Milton some months previously, and the story of Hardy's heart had been one of his last obsessions, though sadly not one strong enough to override the physical pain which led him eventually to suicide.

The basic yarn, as gleaned from Ken by Betty, was as follows. On Hardy's death, it was decided that his ashes should lie in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey. His heart, however, would be buried at Stinsford, the Mellstock of his writings, so that, as the local Mayor was to put it: "We shall have the best part of Mr Hardy still with us in Dorchester."

The heart was duly removed, wrapped in a tea-towel and placed in a biscuit tin which was lodged in a meat-safe in the kitchen of Max Gate, Hardy's home, to await the attention of the undertaker. Unfortunately, when the undertaker arrived he found an

open biscuit tin, a slightly soiled and tattered tea-towel and a cat that showed visible signs of having recently taken the best part of Mr Hardy unto itself.

According to Ken's informant, as relayed to me through Betty, the undertaker's reaction was commendably swift. He grabbed the cat, wrung its neck, wrapped it and the few gristly remains in the tea towel, put the bundle into the biscuit tin and firmly closed the lid.

"Mr 'Ardy," he said, probably panting slightly from his exertions, "wanted 'is 'eart buried at Stinsford, and buried at Stinsford Mr 'Ardy's 'eart shall be."

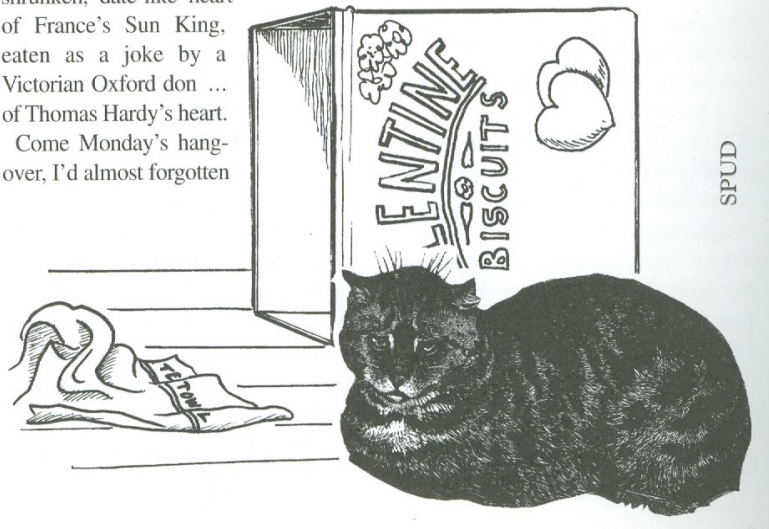
And so it was, layered like those little Russian dolls successively in cat, biscuit tin and polished elm.

I laughed at the preposterous yarn. Let's put together a book, I suggested, of heart stories: of the lost heart of Montrose; of Charles II's heart, chucked in a Whitehall gutter with the rest of his innards by his embalmers; of the shrunken, date-like heart of France's Sun King, eaten as a joke by a Victorian Oxford don ... of Thomas Hardy's heart.

Come Monday's hangover, I'd almost forgotten about it. Then in 1977, the subject came up once more. I had been engaged to research a film on English ghosts for an American television company and the producer had decided to shoot it in Wessex, partly because of the unrivalled scenery, partly because of the plethora of ghostly traditions in the area.

I stayed for the duration with Amanda Allsop, Ken's daughter, and her partner, the late Giles Wordsworth, at their house on Custom House Quay, Weymouth. Giles, a gentle and courteous man, bore a striking resemblance to his great great great grand uncle, the poet William, and was steeped in the literary tradition of Wessex; he was a self-effacing expert not only on his forebears William and Dorothy and their friend Coleridge, but also on William Barnes, Hardy and the various Powyses.

While not entirely convinced, he relished the paradox of the Hardy's heart story. Cats, he pointed out with a twinkle from behind his spectacles, had at



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one period been the bane of Hardy's life. In the bitter years leading up to her death in 1916, Hardy's first wife Emma had bred cats by the dozen in and around Max Gate, possibly as child-substitute reproaches to her husband and her own barren state.

The presence of the prowling cats had engendered unease in the small, solitary, bird-like poet. And, Giles added, after Emma's death a couple, at least, of the cats had remained as rodent catchers on the Max Gate premises, even during the reign of Thomas's beloved terrier, Wessex.

One day, Amanda and Giles and I sallied forth to borrow a coffin. Nothing personal, just one of the props for the film. It proved surprisingly easy to secure the loan, so long as we promised to bring the thing back in good condition. The Weymouth undertaker even threw in an ancient graveyard lantern, of the type that body-snatchers might have used.

During our negotiations over the long pine box, Hardy's heart was aired, as it were, once more. The undertaker remembered not only Hardy, live and walking the streets of Dorchester, but also Charles Hannah, the funeral director who masterminded Hardy's rather complicated obsequies.

"It ill behoves a man in my position," he said, puffing on a black Burmah cheroot, "to say whether the story is true or no. But I'll tell you this for nothing. That's exactly how old Charlie Hannah would have handled the situation."

What, we asked? Heart gone, cat, neck wrung, box, no questions asked?

His reply was a slow nod and a wink through the waft of aromatic tobacco.

In 1986 I moved permanently to Dorset and the subject of what I had come to think of as 'Ardy's 'Eart popped up at dinner parties and in pubs. I, for the most part, did the popping and was struck by two points: the relatively few people among many Dorset-born, hugely literate Hardy buffs, who had heard of the story, and the vehement belligerence of those who had, but felt it an affront to Hardy's memory.

"Categorical nonsense" . . . "absolute rubbish" and, among the lower echelons which form my normal circle of acquaintance, "load of old cobblers" were the principal responses. Had I fallen half in love with an example of early 20th century conspiracy theory, I began to wonder? Was the whole thing a kind of modern rural myth? Or could there, just conceivably, be some truth in the legend?

The only way, I concluded, to put a proper perspective on the matter was to assemble the undisputed facts surrounding Hardy's death and burial and look at these in detail. This, with the invaluable research assistance of Sara Hudston, I have been able to do and here are the results.

Just after Christmas, 1927, Thomas Hardy fell ill with one of those chesty agues that wrack old men in winter. He took to his bed, and his second wife, Florence, sent for her sister Eva to help nurse him. That New Year marked Hardy's passing into his own eighty-eighth and his international status ensured that his illness was noted on the front pages of newspapers throughout the English-speaking world. By the first week of January, he was reported to be getting better.

On Wednesday 11 January as the chill afternoon decayed into twilight, Hardy asked Florence to come to his bedroom and read to him a chosen favourite verse from the work of Omar Khayyam:

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth did make,
And ev'n with Paradise devised the Snake;
For all the Sins wherewith the Face of Man
is blacken'd — Man's forgiveness give — and take!

Eva brought him a bite to eat and a glass of cider, then stoked his bedroom fire and left him to lie peacefully in the rosy glow that it shed. Shortly after eight o'clock, she heard him cry out very clearly and firmly: "Eva! Eva! What is this?"

When she reached his side, she found him still and cold and pulseless. His doctor certified Thomas Hardy dead at nine o'clock that night.

It wasn't, of course, unexpected. Charles Hannah, of the Dorchester firm Hannah and Holland, the funeral director who had buried Hardy's mother and father, was notified and telegrams were sent to London, though an official press statement was not issued until midday on Thursday 12 January; the *Dorset Daily Echo* and *Weymouth Despatch* ran a late extra edition with the news.

By that time Mr Sydney Cotterell, who, with Florence Hardy was joint executor of the will, was in London with Sir James Barrie, masterminding the Westminster Abbey ceremony. Hardy had anticipated this turn of events: "I wish to be buried in Stinsford churchyard" he said in the will, "unless the Nation strongly desires otherwise."

The nation, or at least its literary leaders, had so desired, and the plan was that Hardy's body would be cremated at Woking on Saturday — the crematorium being the nearest to Dorchester in those days — prior to the burial of the ashes at Westminster on Monday, 16 January.

But Florence Hardy was nagged by doubts. When the Reverend Hubert Cowley, vicar of Stinsford, came with his wife to pay their respects on the evening of the ominously dated Friday 13 January, she expressed them: Thomas had been attached all his life to Stinsford church, making it more famous even than the Bronte church at Haworth. Surely it was in St Michael's that his heart metaphorically lay?

Mr Cowley agreed. Indeed, he had brought with him a letter to show Mrs Hardy. Four years previously, when he took up his incumbency, Cowley had asked the great man if, despite his apparent atheism, he could count him a parishioner.

Hardy's reply had been succinct.

12 December, 1924.

Dear Mr Cowley: Yes, regard me as parishioner. Certainly I hope to be still more one when I am in a supine position some day . . . Sincerely yours, Thomas Hardy."

It was at this point that Mrs Cowley said: "Cannot we have Mr Hardy's heart buried at Stinsford?"

The relief to Florence Hardy and Hubert Cowley was immediate. It was the obvious answer. Messengers were sent once more to Charles Hannah and another to Hardy's physician, Dr. E.W. Mann. The latter arrived the same

evening with his partner, Dr. F. L. Nash-Wortham to perform the necessary operation on Hardy's body as it lay in his bedroom.

I asked Emeritus Professor Alan Usher, one of the world's leading forensic pathologists about the procedure. It would be a very simple one, with little or no mess, he said. The Victorians often carried out whole post mortems in the deceased's bedroom. The process of hypostasis — the draining of the blood to the lowest point of the body — begins as soon as circulation ceases, so that the upper surfaces are virtually bloodless.

"Once the flesh of the chest is peeled back the sternum or breast bone is sprung with a couple of strokes of a bone-saw, revealing the heart which lies directly beneath. The great vessels are severed, the heart lifted while the posterior attachments are cut and the organ can then be removed from the body."

Professor Usher estimated that a skilled surgeon could carry out the operation in under two minutes: "Country doctors ought not to take more than five to ten at the outside."

On Florence Hardy's own testimony the heart was then wrapped in a tea-towel, placed in a biscuit tin and left beside the body in Hardy's bedroom overnight — not in a meat-safe in the kitchen, as Kenneth Allsop's informant had averred. Assistants from the undertakers stitched up the body and draped it in Hardy's scarlet gown, received with his honorary degree of Doctor of Literature, University of Cambridge, before placing it in a simple wood coffin.

The following morning was marked by a glorious sunrise resembling, said one newspaper report, "that of the closing scene of the immortal *Tess* story." The hearse arrived at 7.55 am and Charles Hannah entered the house alone, leaving behind the driver and four bearers. Outside a crowd of locals, pressmen, photographers, and a cinema newsreel camera crew waited . . . and waited.

Charles Hannah emerged again, a good ten minutes later. He said not a word, but after strewing some narcissi from the Max Gate garden inside the hearse, he beckoned abruptly to the bearers, and they followed him back inside the house. They reemerged at 8.08 am exactly, carrying the mortal remains of the great poet. The coffin was placed in the hearse.

Slowly the hearse moved off, at walking pace, Charles Hannah striding along by its side, the bearers keeping pace behind. And then an odd incident occurred.

"About 200 yards from the residence," said a report in the *Dorset Daily Echo*, "Mr Hannah suddenly jumped into a seat beside the driver and the hearse accelerated rapidly away before the astonished bearers, who had not known of this arrangement, realised what was happening. . ."

Well, what *had* happened? Had something so unusual occurred during that exceptionally long ten minutes in the bedroom at Max Gate that it had perturbed the normally unperturbable Charles Hannah? Obviously something had rattled him out of his impeccably planned routine. And the hearse incident was not the only hitch in Thomas Hardy's final ceremonies. Something even odder was to happen on Monday.

According to newspaper reports published on Saturday, two identical small bronze urns had been prepared, each bearing the simple inscription "Thomas Hardy O.M." and his dates. In one would be placed the ashes of the body, after the cremation at Woking at 1.30 pm on the Saturday; while the other would be reserved for the heart.

At 2.0 pm on Monday 16 January, the latter urn would be carried from Max Gate the short distance to St Michael's, Stinsford, where the Reverend Hubert Cowley would conduct an ordinary funeral service for villagers, relatives and close friends only.

Hardy's favourite hymns would be sung while the simple urn would stand before the altar steps. And then, to the strains of the Gregorian chant *Nunc Dimittis*, the urn would be carried by Mr Cowley for interment in the grave of Emma, Hardy's first wife. And in the event, that is what happened — though with one significant difference of detail.

Instead of the urn, a large, polished wooden box, about the size and shape of a biscuit tin, stood before the altar and it was this that was subsequently carried for solemn interment by Mr Cowley.

Why the change of plan? No explanation was ever offered but it is certain that the box was overlarge to accommodate such a small urn. . .

So how likely, on balance, is the 'Ardy's 'Eart story? Very likely, according to Professor Usher.

"From a medical point of view, I can see

Rev Hubert Cowley, of St Michael's, Stinsford, carries Hardy's heart (in a cat?) in a casket to its grave.

no flaw in it," he says. "The heart of a man of Hardy's age and small stature would be about the size of a large eating or cider apple. Although he was active almost until his last illness, I would expect the heart to show miocardial scarring — a stringiness of the tissue which comes with age as well as disease.

"But there would be plenty of edible muscle to tempt a cat; with the animal's usual fastidiousness it would probably nibble this out and leave the tubes and valves and so on. Unlike dogs and rats, cats do not normally go in for eating human flesh in cases where, for instance, a body has lain undiscovered for some time. But offal is different. Any cat worth its salt could have sniffed it out, pawed open the biscuit tin and indulged itself in a midnight feast."

Assuming the cat scenario to be true, who would initially know about it? Florence and Eva and Charles Hannah, of course; and Mr Cowley would surely be owed an explanation of the small urn suddenly turning into a hefty box.

And who would they tell? As few people as possible, is the probable answer; given the near-royal nature of the Hardy departure, such an untoward incident would take on an almost sacrilegious aura. But the immediate family, blood relatives of Thomas, with his eye for grotesquerie, might have been quietly amused.

Dorset County Councillor John Antell, Hardy's nephew, tells an interesting family story.

"I was too young to know Tom," he says. "But I spent a great deal of time as a child with my aunt Kate, his younger sister. And she had a big black glossy pussy cat which was supposed to be related to the one that ate the heart."

So he knew about the heart story as a child?

"Oh yes," he recalls. "Aunt Kate told us about it, as a kind of a joke. It was always regarded as a bit of harmless nonsense."

But surely it was an oddly macabre story for an aunt to tell her young nephew about her beloved brother if it wasn't true?

"I suppose it was," he admits.

Perhaps Cowley's curate was in on the secret too. I have seen a statement signed by a young clergyman in the 1930s claiming first hand knowledge of the incident. The owner of the letter, who has always avoided publication, tells me that the signatory was a curate of Cowley's, either at the time of the funeral or immediately afterwards but the owner also refused permission to reproduce or give further details of this interesting document.

In the final analysis, the only objective proof of the 'Ardy's 'Eart story, one way or the other, lies buried in Stinsford churchyard, though I for one am happily convinced by the wealth of subjective detail and the quiet staying power of the myth, if myth it be.

I'm also quite sure that Thomas Hardy, the village atheist with an ever-open eye for the fey and mystical, would have been delighted by the idea of a hungry midnight grimalkin so impertinently stealing his heart away. W

Mystery giant salamanders of the World Part Two — Europe and Asia

Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead

Continuing our essay on mystery giant salamanders of the world, we now focus on cases in Europe and Asia. There is a strand of opinion that the Loch Ness Monster, far from being a plesiosaur , is in fact a giant salamander. The Loch Ness monster, it has been suggested, could be a plesiosaur, a giant eel, a seal, an otter, or the branch of a tree. There is a blog by Steve Plambeck titled New Evidence for Giant Salamanders in Post-Glacial Europe , dated October 6th, 2017, in which he attempts to make the case for the Loch Ness monster being a giant salamander originating in what is now Turkey and migrating to the loch via Doggerland, now submerged beneath the North Sea. The author states:"...So now to the question: How could a theoretical Loch Ness Giant Salamander, that being the thesis of this blog, even stand a chance unless there was a surviving European Giant Salamander first? Pre-ice age salamanders don't count, because Loch Ness didn't exist until after the last glaciation. Europe today is replete with small newts and salamanders of the modern suborder *Salamandroidea*, and then there's the olms, the ancestors of which came racing into Europe before the last glaciation had even finished melting. All of these prove post-glacial Europe is an amenable ecosystem for small, modern salamanders and all manner of other amphibians, but what about those primitive Giant Salamanders that had thrived in Europe before the ice came? I find it a bit surprising that a family that endured the K-Pg mass extinction and flourished another 65 million years couldn't survive a 98,000 year vacation to the nearby Mediterranean, like the rest of the fauna. There could be reasons of course, but Occam's razor leads us to consider a different possibility…" (1) This "different possibility" is that giant salamanders migrated from Göbekli Tepe in Turkey to Loch Ness via Doggerland. Plambeck came across an archaeological site there where a carving of a giant salamander on stone is to be found. "Two of the more bizarre Loch Ness sightings happened in

1888 and 1933. In ’88, Alexander MacDonald reported what he described as a salamander-like creature with “large stubby legs” surfacing in the water. And in ’33, strangest of all, a man named George Spicer and his wife said they witnessed a 25-feet-long creature with a wavy neck cross the road right in front of their car, heading for the loch…” (2) There is an interesting comment by Anonymous on March 21st 2014 at the end of the blog An Niseag vs Nessie—Folklore vs Science of March 10th 2014 by Steve Plambeck: “Special bonus for salamander fans:
"Early in the Second World War, Ian [MacDonald] had been on an exercise in the area with the Cameron Highlanders when, going along the shores of Loch Ness, a disturbance was spotted. They all piled out of the truck and, armed with their spying binoculars, they watched "the beast" for a full twenty minutes. When Hamish [MacDougall] as a little lad was not behaving to Granny's [Annie MacDonald nee Galbraith's] liking, she would threaten "I will throw you to the salamander" – her name for "the monster" ." Peter R. English "A bridge to the past: an oral history of families of Upper GlenUrquhart" (Inverness: Speedprint, 2009) In July 2022 it was announced that the fossil of a giant salamander had been found on the isle of Skye, Scotland. “The research team analysed 166-million-year-old fossils of a type of animal called *Marmorerpeton*, found in Middle Jurassic rocks on the Isle of Skye. They found that it has several key salamander traits, but is not part of the modern group of salamanders. Their results are reported in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*. The specimen is believed to be the oldest salamander fossil found in Europe.” (Oldest European salamander fossil, discovered in Scotland, informs amphibian origins. July 12th 2022. www.ucl.ac.uk) Roy Mackal in his book ` The Monsters of Loch Ness` points out that the crest of a newt could explain the humps of the Loch Ness Monster, though it would have to be a pretty huge newt! According to Karl Shuker in his book Here`s Nessie!, referring to Professor Roy Mackal`s book:” In it Prof.Mackal meticulously examined every reasonable zoological identity, and concluded that the most plausible Nessie candidate was a species of giant newt or salamander-like amphibian, which in his view would account for 88 per cent of the LNM characteristics on file (as opposed to 78 per cent for a species of eel,69 per cent for a plesiosaur,59 per cent for a mollusc,56 per cent for a seal, and 47 per cent for a sea-cow). “There have been other mystery giant salamander sightings in the United Kingdom apart from the case of Loch Ness. In a book titled `In The

West Country` by Francis A. Knight (1896) mention is made of a highly venomous "triton" in the Somerset Levels as follows: " Slender newts, too, swarm in the still water, and great black tritons, the terror of the moorfolk, in whose eyes even the viper is hardly more venomous. " (page 186.) In Flying Snake Volume 5 no. 13 May 2018 I commented: " Now this is very interesting because long ago the triton was thought to be a kind of mermaid or large sea snail, according to Wikipedia. Or perhaps a salamander. Francis Knight specifically says they were distinguished from newts, or perhaps they were newts but of a darker colouration? The Somerset Moors are in north Somerset and the Somerset Levels not far away.

According to the Surrey Advertiser of August 8th 1908 a fire salamander was discovered in Surrey: "The Recent Discovery of a Lizard: Mr F.H.Elsley writes: The lizard recently found on the Hog`s Back has been sent to the Educational Museum at Haslemere. It proves to be from Central and Southern Europe...How it came to be found on the Hog`s Back is certainly a mystery." (see Flying Snake Volume 4 Number 12 September 2017 pp 60-61) Jumping forwards to 2015, according to an article in Animals and Men Issue 53 May 2015 by Steve Baxter, he was exploring a pond in a quarry not far from his home in the village of West Mickley near Stocksfield in Northumberland. He lifted up a large flat log " to find what I `think` were European salamanders…" Presumably he meant fire salamanders, see image on the following page.

Elsewhere in Europe there is the case of the Tatzelwurm , a salamander -like cryptid said to inhabit the Bavarian, Swiss and Austrian alps, said to be aggressive and venomous, compared by Bernard Heuvelmans, the father of cryptozoology , to the Gila Monster of the south-west United States, (Arizona and New Mexico.) The Tatzelwurm is 60cm to 90cm long, and looks like a worm with stumpy short feet. So vaguely salamander-like in appearance. In 1861, Friedrich von Tschundi in his work on Alpine fauna Das Theirleben der Alpenwelt wrote: " In the Bernese Oberland and the Jura the belief is widespread that there exists a sort of `cave-worm` which is thick, 30cm to 90cm long, and has two short legs; it appears at the approach of storms after a long dry spell." " (Bernard Heuvelmans On The Track of Unknown Animals p.11.) From the point of view of the Tatzelwurm being a mystery giant salamander it is interesting that the Tatzelwurm is said to appear on the eve

of storms because the Hong Kong mystery giant salamander Megalobatrachus sligoi (now known as Andrias sligoi) appeared in a drain after a " particularly violent" (Wikipedia—South China giant salamander) rain storm in April 1920. In the same book just quoted from Heuvelmans says: "There can be no doubt that it exists. An enquiry made in the 1930s by Dr Gerhard Venzmer and engineer Hans Flucher brought to light the evidence of some 60 witnesses. They all agreed that it was between 30cm and 90 cm long and more or less cylindrical in shape, the tail end of the body ending rather abruptly. It was brownish on the back and lighter underneath. It had a short and thick tail; there was no narrowing at the neck; and its heavy and blunt nosed head had large, round eyes. Its legs were slender and small; and some even maintained that it had no hind-legs at all. Some,but not all, said it had scales, but in any case it hissed like a snake." (Heuvelmans, ibid, pp 11-12.) Heuvelmans states categorically (p.17) thus: " Whether the *Tatzelwurm* is a European species of *Heloderma* , an enormous skink, a giant salamander or some completely new animal, there is little doubt that it exists…" Dr Karl Shuker (personal communication , August 11th 2023) believes the Tatzelwurm is a kind of reptile because it is covered in scales. Rosenrot posted the following comment on the Unexplained Mysteries.com Forum on June 3rd 2007: "The theory of the Tatzelwurm being a giant salamander is rather interesting. If I remember correctly giant salamanders can live in rather cold climates which would explain the "Tatzelwurm" being seen all over Europe. But I don't know how vicious giant salamanders are... Didn't the Tatzelwurm actually try to attack a few people?

Now turning to Asia: The most well known mystery giant salamander in Asia is Megalobatrachus sligoi, or Andreas sligoi as it is now known. In April 1920 after a heavy shower of rain a giant salamander was discovered in a depression in the ground at the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens. During this particularly violent storm a large drain pipe in the Gardens burst, carving a large depression into the land that the escaped salamander was washed into. It was captured and kept in a large circular basin, where it was fed daily with

-live tadpoles and occasionally beef . (Wikipedia—South China Giant Salamander.)

Wikipedia. Holotype of *Andrias sligoi.* (BMNH 1945. 11.7.1.): dorsal view.

Wikipedia goes on to say: “The captured salamander was later seen by George Ulick Browne, the then-Marquess of Sligo, as he was touring the area. Browne persuaded the then-governor of Hong Kong, Reginald Edward Stubbs, to present the salamander to the Zoological Society of London. Upon receiving the individual, Boulenger found it to be physically distinct from "*Megalobatrachus maximus*" (the former species into which his father, George Albert Boulenger, lumped both the Japanese giant salamander and Chinese giant salamander) and it thus likely represented a new species. During Boulenger's description, he named the species *M. sligoi* in honor of Browne's title…”

It could be argued, as Wikipedia does that the origin of this salamander was southern Guangdong province, after all English language Hong Kong newspapers in the first decade of the Twentieth century described “fish with legs” in the Pearl River estuary which divides Macau on the west side with Hong Kong on the east. However there is a precedent for animals to live in Hong Kong whilst not being men-

- tioned in text books of Hong Kong zoology; I am referring to the Axis deer and the dhole. Also there are adequate pools and streams on Hong Kong island and in the New Territories which could have contained giant salamanders especially in the 1920s in the then British colony of Hong Kong before the days of urban encroachment upon the countryside. Several years ago I did some further research into the origins of Sligoi`s salamander using the South China Morning Post online newspaper archive and I came across the fascinating story of Mr Crook, who in a letter to the S.C.M.P stated that in 1909 he "...took two salamanders and put them in a stream on the Peak which flowed from near Mountain Lodge and emptied itself into the sea near Pokfulam. Years afterwards I went to the Zoological Gardens here in London to see a giant salamander which was on exhibit there. The announcement said it had been obtained in Hong Kong. *I often wondered if it was one of the grand-children of the ones I had let loose in the stream on the Peak* (Emphasis my own.) (3) I did some further research and found out that there was a conduit running around to the northern part of Hong Kong island to the vicinity of the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens. Maybe the salamander travelled along this conduit to reach the Gardens? See Animals and Men issue # 53, May 2015 for the complete story. Mr Crook`s letter to the South China Morning Post is dated July 3rd 1953. The Hong Kong Police Magazine for March 1956 reported on another probable giant salamander, this time in the Wanchai district of northern Hong Kong island. A police officer saw an animal that emerged from a drain. It was about eighteen inches long, had four legs, a spade head , a tail and a mouth full of saw-edged teeth. The article says: " It was subsequently removed to the Hong Kong University, where it was later identified as a `Giant Salamander` . Many of these are evidently imported into the Colony for sale in the local markets. As a matter of interest , they are perfectly harmless and do not possess saw-edged teeth…" (4) According to Dale Drinnon`s Frontiers of Zoology blog `The Giant Salamander Theory at Loch Ness` of June 7th 2011, referring to Rupert T. Gould`s book `Loch Ness Monster: " The suggestion that X might be

some species of giant salamander "indigenous to Loch Ness and its rivers" was made by Lt-Col. W. H. Lane, Glenmoriston, in a letter to the Inverness Courier (10.x.33). While pointing out that the largest living variety is a native of Japan (Although specimens have been obtained in China), he stated that he had shot what he believed to be a creature of the kind in the Chin Hills district of Burma…" (5) Shane adds: Continuing with the line of thinking from part 1,there is the distinct possibility of undiscovered, giant salamanders in California, USA and Canada. The California reports were covered in part one of this article, so, next up are some Canadian reports that allude to giant salamanders. There have been unexplained reports of "black logs" and "black alligators" throughout Canada, dating back many years. Our interpretation is that what is actually being witnessed are in fact giant salamanders.

Many of the Canadian giant salamander reports fall under the umbrella term of Lake Monsters.

In Cryptozoology, every distinct subject usually encompasses a wide variety of animal reports and/or phenomena. Rarely, is a subject so cut and dried. It is the Cryptozoologist's mission to determine if indeed an unknown animal is part of the dossier of reports and to determine what that animal most likely is within the framework of zoological classification and to determine the most likely way, based on a study of the animal, to prove it's existence, thereby ensuring the survival of it's species and the protection of it's environment.

Having said that, when examining lake monster reports, one is subject to a complex variety of boat wakes, wave patterns, atmospheric phenomena, misidentified known animals, possible unknown, unclassified animals and sometimes, even more amomalous phenomena. So, it gets complex, sorting it all out. One aspect that can explain some Canadian and American reports, is Sturgeon. Sturgeon, no doubt, account for many Lake monster reports in the United States and Canada. Sturgeon are very big, impressive fish, that can surface looking like a "prehistoric monster", because, they are indeed prehistoric fish. Their appearance is startling and many times are not seen for what they are, because only their jagged back is seen, looking very bizzare. Lake Sturgeon (Acipenser fulvescens), grow up to 8 feet and are a freshwater species, whose fossils date back to the Pleistocene Epoch. Atlantic Sturgeon (Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus), a marine species, grow up to 15 feet and could be seen while swimming upstream to spawn, in eastern Canada, or America. It is considered a living fossil.

So, eliminating Sturgeon confusion from the "black alligator" dossier,

Atlantic sturgeon. Acipenser oxyrhynchus. Wikipedia.

one is left with a core of unexplained reports, alluding to a very sizeable animal living in Canada and California.
Escaped/abandoned pets have also to be considered. A cute, little, family pet of 6 inches can quickly grow to a 6-foot toothy menace! Then, to give the animal a chance, people release unwanted pets into the wild, not realising the disruption they cause. In the case of the "black alligators", escaped/abandoned pets could not survive Canadian winters and the sheer number and description of the reports over long periods of time also eliminates the "pet" explanation, so beloved by cryptozoological critics, cynics and Philistines. Cryptozoologists do indeed debunk certain reports or subjects, when debunking is warranted, without any acknowledgement from cryptozoological critics, cynics and Philistines. So, in essence, Cryptozoology is self-correcting.
In the case of the possibility of giant salamanders in Canada and California, once the other possibilities have been eliminated, one is still left with the fascinating prospect of an unknown animal, which, of course, what Cryptozoology is all about, those possibilities.....
Canadian black alligator reports date back over 100 years. One George Goudreau, witnessed an alligator-like animal emerge from Lake Kootenay, British Columbia, on 10 October, 1900. The "alligator" was seen from a distance of only 12 feet away, as it emerged from the Lake onto land and moved toward a pile of rotten compost on shore, searching for food. The creature, about 3 feet long, black and green in colour, was observed to have small, clawed feet, 10 inches long and used it's claws and snout to move around the pile of

rubbish, looking for tasty morsels. Eventually the creature went back into the Lake, leaving behind a trail of webbed feet on the sandy shoreline. Later on, a similar animal, 15 feet long, was seen by A. C. D. Robertson in Kootenay Lake. He witnessed a large, scaly body that raised out of the lake to seize fish that had been tied to a stake. In Kootenay Lake, we have reports of different sized creatures, thereby eliminating the escaped pet theory, that was untenable to begin with, since pet alligators can't survive Canadian winters, to grow to some of the sizes reported. In contrast, the Asian giant salamanders are found in cold-water streams and rivers. In 1915, small black alligators were seen in a small mud Lake, in the Hope Valley area of British Columbia, by Charles Flood, Green Hicks and Donald Macrae. The 3 men tried unsuccessfully to capture some of the small, slippery, completely black, "alligators", which were only a few inches long.

Pitt Lake British Columbia Wikipedia

One Harvey MacRae, stated that his father had seen a big, round, black, 15-20 foot long "tree trunk", lying low in the lake water of Moffat Lake, Quebec. Onshore of Lake Moffat, a big, burnt log was seen stretched across a foot-path near the lake. The "log" was seen to rise up and scuttle off toward the lake!

A recent sighting of a possible giant salamander from Pitt Lake, British Columbia, dates from 2002. In 2002, Pitt River Lodge owner Dan Gerak saw a creature that was over 5 feet long, on 2 occasions, that had smooth, dark, black skin and looked like an over-sized salamander. Yes, over 5 feet long! This is on par with the size of the Asiatic giant salamanders. But, we're still talking about Canada, right? Right!

Similar creatures have been seen in Cultus Lake, Chilliwack Lake, Nitinak Lake and the Fraser River, in British Columbia. Other reports .

emanate from lakes in Quebec, as well.
As discussed in part 1 of Giant Salamanders Of The World, North America shares many affinities to China, relating to flora and fauna. An undiscovered population of an unknown species of giant salamander, in North America, similar in morphological size and appearance, ecologically inhabiting a similar habitat, with similar behavioural traits, to the giant Asian salamanders, would not be out of the question. The discovery of such an unknown animal in North America, is well within the realm of possibility.
What about the possibility of giant salamanders in other parts of the world? Well, Richard discussed many of those intriguing subjects in part 1 and 2 of Giant Salamanders Of The World.
That having been said, one very interesting prospect has to do with giant salamander reports from Lake Titicaca, Bolivia and giant salamander reports from elsewhere in South America.
In the region of the headwaters of the Amazon River, in South America, a giant salamander has been reported since the 1950's, by various Amerindian tribes and timber workers. The animal is called Axolotlis and has been described both as a slimy dog skittering through the forest and as a crocodile (caiman?) sized salamander, reaching lengths of 15-20 feet. The name of this cryptid is very similar to the Axolotl salamander from Mexico.
Giant salamanders with frog faces and bulging eyes, have been seen in Lake Titicaca, Bolivia. There are also reports there of giant tadpoles. These reports could possibly refer to a new population of Axolotl salamanders. The "frog faces" and "bulging eyes" are a dead-ringer for an Axolotl. Even a description such as "giant tadpole", could describe an Axolotl amphibian.

Axolotls are neotenous amphibians, meaning that they retain their large, feathery gills into adulthood and remain in an aquatic environment, rather than adopting a more typical, terrestrial existence. Axolotls are critically endangered where they are currently found, in 1 lake only, in the proximity of Mexico City, Mexico. There are no species of giant Axolotls currently known to science. They reach a 1 foot maximum length. A new, distinct population may have a different size range, or, it could be the case that the giant salamanders reported from Lake Titicaca are Axolotls similar-sized to the Mexican species, yet, possibly, a new species of Axolotl.
Axolotls have amazing regenerative powers. They can even grow back and replace lost limbs! Amazing! We have much to learn from these

Axolot

awesome amphibians.

If new populations of Axolotl were found to exist, it would be wonderful news for zoology and especially, for the conservation and future of this adorable, highly endangered, amazing amphibian species.

The same holds true for any of the giant salamanders discussed in this article. We are talking about "real" animals here and the zoological discovery of any of them would be sensational, with the ultimate goal being along with their scientific and worldwide acknowledgement, the protection of the new animal species and it's habitat. This would ensure the protection of the cryptid and all other plant and animal species sharing it's ecological habitat.

In 1984, the world population was 4 billion. Now, the world population is 8 billion. Double! As man continues to encroach on all living things, destroy habitats, pollute the environment, exterminate for "bush meat", or "traditional medicine", wage senseless, "war pig" wars, on our own kind and dumb-down the mind, through over-reliance on machines, let us hope for the animals' sake and ours, that a few far-sighted Cryptozoologists will continue to stay On The

Track Of Unknown Animals. The Great Days Of Zoology Are Not Done!

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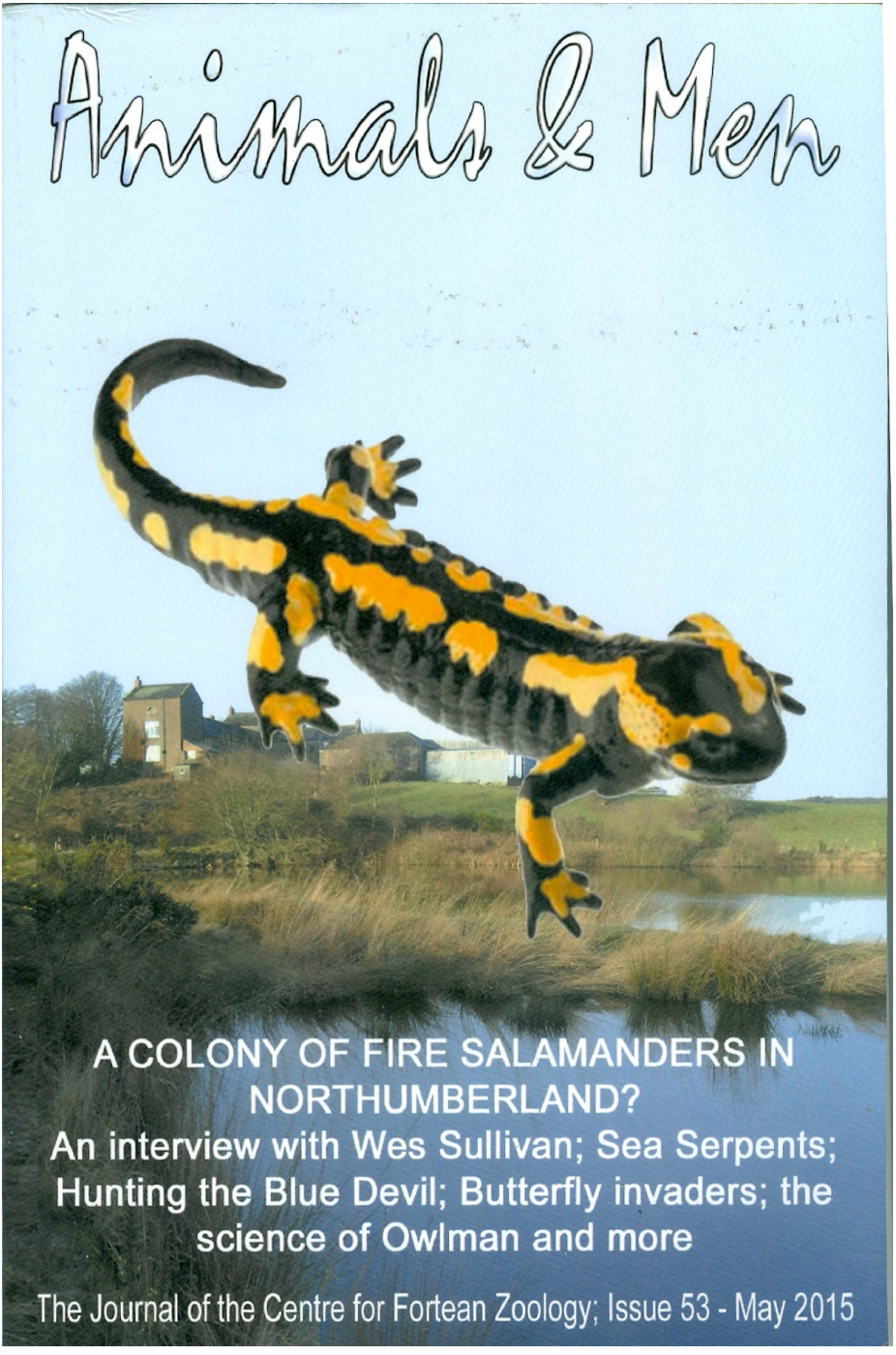
Animals & Men



A COLONY OF FIRE SALAMANDERS IN NORTHUMBERLAND?

An interview with Wes Sullivan; Sea Serpents; Hunting the Blue Devil; Butterfly invaders; the science of Owlman and more

The Journal of the Centre for Fortean Zoology; Issue 53 - May 2015

The 1934 Killer Kangaroo of Tennessee
by Kate Shaw of Strange Animals Podcast
(strangeanimalspodcast.blubrry.net)

A friend told me recently about an encounter her mother Diane had as a child in the late 1950s. The family was on vacation, possibly traveling through the lower Carolinas, although Diane no longer remembers for sure. They stopped to fuel the car, and she and her sister went inside to use the bathroom. When they opened the bathroom door, inside was a kangaroo. The girls were shocked, naturally. They looked at the kangaroo. The kangaroo just sat there. After a few minutes, a man came and led the kangaroo away. The girls returned to the car and told the rest of the family. No one believed them. Phantom or misplaced kangaroos (and wallabies, which is probably what Diane saw) have been reported in the United States for well over a hundred years, with the oldest appearing in newspapers in 1899. One of the most intriguing stories comes from 1934.Over five days in January 1934, an animal described as kangaroo-like was repeatedly seen outside the town of South Pittsburg, Tennessee, near Chattanooga. It reportedly killed and ate several dogs, including large police dogs, along with geese, ducks, and other livestock. One witness said it "looked like a giant kangaroo running and leaping across the field." It was large, brown in color, and extremely fast, but that's the only description given. A search party followed strange tracks up Signal Mountain, but lost the tracks near a cave. After two local hunters, the Sloane brothers, killed an animal described as a lynx or wildcat on Signal Mountain, the newspapers claimed that was the kangaroo. There's even a photo of the poor dead animal in the Chattanooga Daily Times, and it's clearly a bobcat. Bobcats are about twice the size of domestic cats and they certainly look nothing like kangaroos. This particular bobcat weighed 40 pounds, or 18 kilograms, and measured 50 inches long, or 127 centimeters. That's big for a bobcat, but witnesses who saw the kangaroo said the wildcat looked nothing like it

and was definitely nowhere near the size of the animal they saw. They estimated that the kangaroo weighed around 150 pounds, or 68 kilograms. The local police chief launched a "mad dog drive," where any dogs suspected of being exposed to rabies were killed. Some people thought the kangaroo might actually be a wolf. But by February of 1934, sightings had ceased. Twenty-five years after the event, on January 31, 1959, the Chattanooga Daily Times ran a short article about the kangaroo in its "Looking Backward" column. In the February 10, 1959 "Looking Backward," it printed a follow-up letter received from Roy M. Woodfin of South Pittsburg, Tennessee. Roy Woodfin was the editor of a small newspaper called the South Pittsburg Hustler (later renamed the Marion County News). In his letter to the Chattanooga Daily Times, Woodfin wrote, "That it was a circulation-builder there was no doubt… In fact, the whole thing was concocted, and we still feel our share of guilt. […] This story has been repeated since 1934, just 25 years ago, and, as stated above, we knew it to be a hoax and that it originated with no intent to harm anyone… If asked why we kept silent so long, our answer would be that we just didn't want to spoil the fun. At long last we can say with truthfulness that there were no W.H. and Ed Sloan brothers, no Milton Drucker…, no 'kangaroo or timber wolf' that we knew of, but a story that went over with a bang." The Sloan brothers were the hunters who had killed the big bobcat in 1934. The February 26,1959 "Looking Backward" column ran another letter, this one from H.L. Walker, who said he knew W.H. and Ed Sloan (although both had died by 1959), and that they had been well-known hunters with a pack of foxhounds. The presence of the bobcat and the hunters seems well established, so it's probable that Woodfin didn't mean the men didn't exist, but that their actions were folded into the hoax. In the early 1980s Loren Coleman wrote about the hoax in The Book of Lists #3, concluding "Horace N. Minnis of South Pittsburg, Tenn.—a stringer for the Chattanooga Times—admitted perpetrating the hoax." However, Coleman revisited the subject in 2010 in his long-running blog,Cryptomundo, where he pointed out that Minnis wasn't a news-

-paper correspondent in 1934 and couldn't have had anything to do with a newspaper hoax. Horace N. Minnis, more commonly referred to as Horace Minnis, Sr., died in 1945 at the age of 66. He worked for the South Pittsburg Hustler through at least the 1910s until 1920 (minus the years when he served in WWI), when he moved to Washington DC. It's not clear when he moved back to South Pittsburg—possibly 1922—but he worked there as assistant postmaster and later as a member of the police force. He was also a long-time correspondent to the Chattanooga Daily Times until just a few months before his death. In other words, it's possible that Minnis was still connected with the Hustler in some capacity in 1934. South Pittsburg isn't a very big community even today, with a population of just over 3,100, and even if Minnis wasn't actively working for the newspaper in 1934, he probably knew the editor, Woodfin. He might have given Woodfin the idea for a hoax, or he might have dreamed up the hoax with Woodfin as his accomplice. Or, of course, it might not have been a hoax at all—but I refuse to believe that a kangaroo was bouncing around in East Tennessee eating dogs in January 1934. What might have been doing so, if anything, remains a mystery.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Brandon Flugaur for his help researching this story. Thanks also to Diane, and her daughter Kelly, for telling me about Diane's kangaroo encounter.

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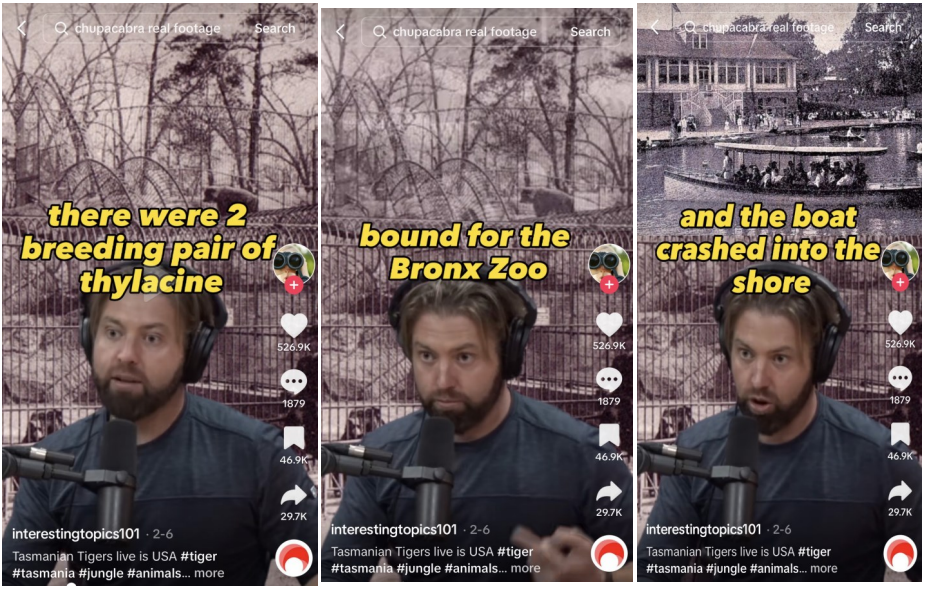
According to This Theory, It`s Possible that Chupacabra Sightings Are Actually the Supposedly Extinct Thylacine

What do you think?

EXEMPLORE NEWS I FEB 8, 2023

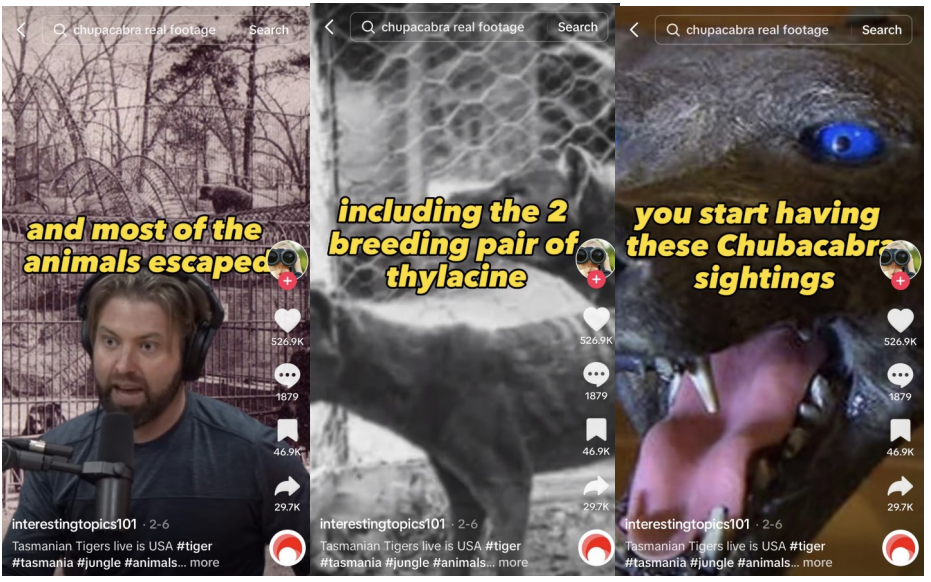
Thanks to Michela de Mattei

The chupacabra is a creature popularised by the Puerto Rican press after a series of attacks on local livestock. Since then, alleged Chupacabras sightings have been witnessed throughout Latin America, the American Southwest and even the world. Forrest Galante attributes the Chupacabra sightings to a pair of Thylacines that were shipwrecked en route to the Bronx Zoo in the early 20th century.



The theory goes that some Thylacines were on their way to America to be exhibited in the Bronx Zoo, but the ship crashed and many animals managed to escape, including the pair of Tasmanian tigers that would later give rise to the new generation that is nowadays mistaken for chupacabras on account of their battered appearance. Although the theory has little foundation, we can note the similar canine appearance, the kangaroo posture and how the stripes could be mistaken for spines. Furthermore, Thylacines were known to suck the blood of their prey, which makes them similar to the vampire Chupacabra.

https://exemplore.com/news/chupacabra-thylacine


chupacabra real footage
Search
and most of the animals escaped
including the 2 breeding pair of thylacine
you start having these Chubacabra sightings
526.9K
1879
46.9K
29.7K
interestingtopics101 · 2-6
Tasmanian Tigers live is USA #tiger #tasmania #jungle #animals... more

chupacabra real footage
Search
the chubacabra that we've reported running around
is actually a tiny remnant population
of these thylacine
526.9K
1879
46.9K
29.7K
Repost
interestingtopics101 · 2-6
Tasmanian Tigers live is USA #tiger #tasmania #jungle #animals... more

Chubacabra has
been attributed
to the possibility

Sighting of a thylacine in New South Wales
Mike Hardcastle

Hi Richard, my dad has passed away a few years ago but i have the report written out below, - Sighting occurred at Kharua State Forest New South Wales. Pat Hogan Thyalcine report early 1970s. Report - "Thylacine sighting on Pacific Highway Kharua, by Mr. Pat Hogan, then residing at Rutherford, near Maitland. Pat owned a property, a bush block near Kharua on which he ran a few head of cattle. On this particular occasion he drove up to check on his cattle after he knocked off work at Rutherford. Near Kharua his head-lights picked up two Thylacines on the side of the road. He pulled up and they retreated into the bush on the side of the road. Finished his trip and checked his cattle next day. Returned home and went up again the following night accompanied by his wife. At the same spot the Thylacines were seen again, and again dissapeared into the bush. His wife later verified that they were Thylacines from a library book on native animals, no doubt whatever. Pat was a bushman, and knew dingos, said they looked a bit like Hyenas. He saw the Thylacine pictures in the book and there was no doubt they were Thylacines. It was near Karuah Nature Reserve they were seen."

Also here is another short report from dad - Sightings ocurred somewhere in the Tasmanian Hinterland. "Pre Second World War, around 1936 and 1937 report from Tasmanian ex- trapper. Said that going around his traps he used to be followed at a distance by Thylacines."

Notes & Queries

'Dead' woman found breathing in coffin

BBC online

June 13th 2023

“Mourners at the wake of an elderly Ecuadorean woman were startled to discover she was still alive. A hospital doctor in the city of Babahoyo declared Bella Montoya, 76, dead following a suspected stroke. She was placed in a coffin and taken to a funeral parlour, where relatives held a vigil before her planned burial. When, after almost five hours, they opened the coffin to change her clothes ahead of the funeral, the woman gasped for air. "My mum started to move her left hand, to open her eyes, her mouth; she struggled to breathe," her son Gilbert Balberán described the moment he realised his mother was still alive. Video taken by one of the mourners shows her lying in an open casket struggling to breathe, while another complains that an ambulance they called has not yet arrived. ..”

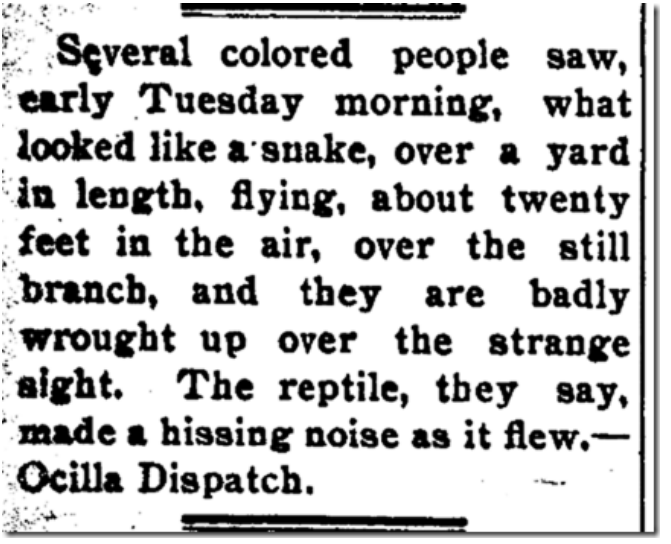
New species of jellyfish in Hong Kong

New box jellyfish species found in Hong Kong's waters - study | Reuters April 19th 2023

HONG KONG, April 19 (Reuters) - A Hong Kong university team

said it has discovered a new species of box jellyfish in the city's Mai Po Nature Reserve, the first discovery of the venomous species in China's waters. Baptist University (HKBU) together with WWF-Hong Kong, Ocean Park Hong Kong and University of Manchester said on Tuesday that the team collected jellyfish samples from a brackish shrimp pond over 2020-2022 and found they contained a new species. Named Tripedalia maipoensis in reflection of its locality, it has a cube-shaped, colourless body with 24 eyes. It has three tentacles up to 10 cm (3.94 inches) long which resemble boat paddles, allowing it to produce strong thrusts, making the species swim faster than other kinds of jellyfish, the study said…"

Flying Snake in Georgia in 1903. Thanks to Bob Skinner Fitzgerald Enterprise Oct 31st 1903



Several colored people saw, early Tuesday morning, what looked like a snake, over a yard in length, flying, about twenty feet in the air, over the still branch, and they are badly wrought up over the strange sight. The reptile, they say, made a hissing noise as it flew.—Ocilla Dispatch.

Fire snake in Western Mexico
CFZ Blog by Richard Muirhead June 20th 2023

I today (Friday June 16th 2023) came across a cryptid I have never come across before called the fire snake of Western Mexico. I was looking for reports of salamanders in Loch Ness when I came across the following snippet in the Aberdeen Press and Journal for January 30th 1924: " Another peculiar creature is the fire snake of Western Mexico. This serpent not only possesses the properties of the famous salamander , but is actually supposed to be able to set fire to dry herbage." Presumably this refers to the folklore belief that salamanders can survive fire.The image here is of the Sonora Semiannulata which struck me of being a fiery red and black colour, but I do not know if it really is or was the fire snake of Western Mexico. This snake featured also inhabits the south-western states of the U.S.A

Mysterious animal in Leeds 1912

Sheffield Evening Telegraph April 16th 1912

Mysterious Animal

Leeds family terrorised;

Woman bitten

“For three months past, a strange little beast has been alarming a Headingley household. It has been variously held to be a weasel, a rat , or some strange creature from the East. On several occasions the animal has flown at and bitten a maid at the house in question. Professional rat-catchers and others have been on its track, but without success. So far only the maid has seen it, but the kitchen door of the house bears long scratches, as from the claws of some animal that has jumped from a shelf. Flour has been scattered about and jars have been dislodged from the shelves. It is thought by some to be a

weasel that has somehow taken up its abode in the house, and though traps have been set and dogs introduced , no capture has been made. The family are in a state of terror, not knowing from day to day what will happen."

This case reminds me of Gef the talking mongoose of the Isle of Man.

Missing 50-year-old tortoise found after two years on run

I paper June 21st 2023

" A pet tortoise that went missing for two years has been reunited with its owners after it was found crawling around an equestrian centre five miles away. Jemima managed to make a getaway from the home of Charles Waddell in May 2021, leaving his eight year old daughter Beatrice, "devastated"…"

Giant moth in Swindon Wiltshire

Expert shocked after ` world`s largest moth` found in Swindon

www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk

June 23rd 2023

"An expert has been left "shocked" after the world`s largest moth was found in a Swindon garden. Sharron Long photographed the gigantic insect, which is as big as her hand, at her daughter's house in Oakhurst on Tuesday, saying at first she thought it was a prank. With browny-orange wings, it is believed to be an atlas moth, which is extremely rare to see in England given its native home is in the forests of south-east Asia. According to Guinness World Records, it is the largest moth in the world in terms of overall size…"

SNAKE MYSTERY
Reptile found in Armley Road, Leeds
Yorkshire Evening Post
March 28th 1936

" Mr Tom Battle, an employee of Leeds Corporation Cleansing Department, was leading his horse and cart through the gate of the Destructor yard in Armley Road at 8 a.m. today when he saw a man standing in the road holding what looked like a piece of rope, in his hand. "Er y`are mate" he shouted, "Take `old of this". Mr Battle took hold, when suddenly the "rope"moved,and, looking at it, he found he was grasping a snake.

He went at once into the office and put the snake into a large glass jar. The police were then informed by telephone. The snake, about 2ft long, is greyish green with black specks towards the tail and it is black underneath. It is very restive , and darts out a forked tongue when anybody approaches."

Rare marsh fritillary found in Cumbria
I paper June 29th 2023

One of Europe`s rarest butterflies, the marsh fritillary, has been found in the Lake District. The site at Haweswater is managed by the RSPB and the discovery was made earlier this month, it was revealed yesterday. The butterfly was once widespread throughout the UK, but numbers declined severely during the 20th century.

Orcas attacking boats
The Times June 30th 2023

Orca `attacks` on boats have puzzled experts—but all-out conflict with humanity is unlikely.

"For three years, orcas named Gladis have been menacing shipping

in the Strait of Gibraltar. They have been raking hulls, tearing off rudders and ramming boats. Yachts have been immobilised, scientists baffled. Then, last week, Wim Rutten, a Dutch yachtsman fishing for mackerel between Shetland and Norway, 2000 miles from the scene of the orca onslaught, felt a bash on his hull. And another, and another. What was most frightening, he said, was hearing the loud breathing of the orca as it came in for another pass…"

A Strange Egg

Cambria Daily Leader

May 29th 1907

Mr W.E.Burgess, Lansdowne, West Cross, has in his possession an egg laid by one of his buff Orpington hens on Wednesday morning ,the shell of which is a very deep chocolate colour, in fact almost black. In addition to this, the shell is uniformly rough, just like sandpaper.

Pink Grasshopper in Wales

www.bbc.co.uk

Rare pink grasshopper spotted in garden

July 3rd 2023

"An amateur photographer was stunned after he spotted a rare pink grasshopper at the bottom of his garden.
Gary Phillips, 65, was pruning his dahlias in Llandegfan, Anglesey, when he was shocked by the "vivid colour" of the insect.

"I'd never heard of them," said Mr Phillips, who then crawled across his garden with his camera to snap some pics.

Some experts have suggested people have only about a 1% chance of seeing a pink grasshopper in their lifetime."

Orange frog in Essex

Sunday Mirror

May 24th 1959

"Essex Field Club found a cream and orange frog."

I e-mailed the Essex Field Club on July 10th 1959 in order to find out more information about this. They replied, suggesting I look in the Archive section of their website, which I did. Unfortunately I couldn`t find this particular story of an orange and cream coloured frog, but I did find a story of….

A Tree frog in Epping Forest

According to The Essex Naturalist Volume 1 , 1887 a tree frog was found in a swampy area behind the Infant Orphan Asylum in Wanstead. It was suspected that they might breed.

Pink frog entombed in a tree

Belfast Newsletter October 30th 1939

To summarise this story: At an unknown location a pink coloured frog was found in a tree trunk. The frog had been buried for fifty years and it was found by someone called Mr John M` Callum, a farmer, who was part of a team sawing the tree into planks.

Moth species rediscovered

I paper July 31st 2023

Moth species thought lost is rediscovered

A rare moth has been discovered in what is believed to be its last remaining stronghold in the UK. Two reddish buff moths were found at

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust sanctuary on the Isle of Wight following concerns the species had been lost for ever. The last such moth was seen in 2019.

Six-legged skink

My friend Andrew Hine sent me this image in late July 2023. It was originally posted on the Minnesota Naturalists Facebook group page on July 27th by Isaac Simburger. According to Jon Downes of the CFZ it shows a six-legged skink.

Record sized hail in Italy

The Guardian online July 31st 2023

Weather tracker: new European record set as 19cm hailstone found in Italy

"Temperatures were not the only weather-related record to be broken over the past couple of weeks. The European hail record has been

breached too. Twice.

On 19 July 2023, there were several very large hailstones, more than 10cm in diameter measured along their longest axis, recorded across parts of Italy and Croatia. One of these stones, measuring 16cm in diameter, was recorded in Carmignano di Brenta, Italy, and broke the previous largest hail record in Europe, which was previously held by a 15cm stone found in Romania in 2016.

However, just five days later, a new record was set. At about 9pm UTC on 24 July 2023, a 19cm hailstone was found in the town of Azzano Decimo, also in Italy…"

Black squirrel in London

Thanks to Bob Skinner

southwarknews.co.uk

Super rare black squirrel spotted scampering around Walworth

July 31st 2023

"A rare black squirrel has been spotted scampering around Walworth. Local resident Henry Long, 54, photographed the rodent near Salisbury Row Park, on Sunday afternoon (July 30). Henry said: " I`d seen it before but normally I`m walking my dog and the dog hates squirrels so it chases it up a tree. So if he`s with me, I can`t usually get a photo…"

Hunt for Loch Ness Monster

The Times August 4th 2023

Loch Ness centre to begin biggest hunt in 50 years

"The largest search for the Loch Ness monster in decades begins this month. Staff from the Loch Ness Centre at Drumnadrochit have teamed up with Loch Ness Exploration (LNE), a group of voluntary researchers, to conduct the biggest surface-water survey in more than 50 years…"

Alligator stuck inside a tree

Gravesend Reporter, North Kent and South Essex Advertiser November 8th 1890

" This is an evidence of the superior character of the Yankee journalists` imagination. " John Wilson, living near Aster, Florida, in cutting a big cypress a few days ago, found therein a living alligator, seven feet long. As the opening in the tree was not half large enough for the `gator to get through, the presumption is that it crawled in when quite young and lived on other animals and reptiles that sought refuge there."

Lion in Tennessee

The Columbia Herald November 19th 1909

According to this newspaper a lion or catamount was thought to be responsible for killing domestic animals and disturbing people in the vicinity of Bell Buckle and Hoovers Gap.

Large lizard found in Channel Islands

Thanks to Bob Skinner

Yahoo News August 13th 2023

Huge 3ft lizard found on Channel island is so big it is being kept in a kennel

" Animal rescue experts were left stunned after they were called to retrieve a huge tropical lizard found wandering around on one of the Channel islands. The 3ft creature, which is believed to be a Tegu lizard, is so big it is currently being kept in a kennel while its rescuers look for a permanent home for it…"

Very peculiar sea monster

Derby Daily Telegraph

July 24th 1948

Another Monster

" Fishermen and tourists along Canada`s Pacific coast are reporting the appearance of a serpent or super-fish described as being like a long hairy snake with a face like an ape`s."

Two new species of mole discovered in Turkey

The Guardian online August 11th 2023

Scientists unearth two new types of mole in eastern Turkey

"Scientists have identified two types of mole that they believe have been living undiscovered in Turkey. DNA technology confirmed the creatures were biologically distinct from other moles. Both inhabit mountainous regions in eastern Turkey and can survive in temperatures of up to 50C (122F) in summer and under 2 metres (about 6ft) of snow in winter.

Only one species, *Talpa europaea*, is found in Britain but further east there are a number of different moles, many of which have very small geographical ranges…"

A peculiar giraffe

International media in late August 2023 reported the birth of a giraffe completely without its usual distinctive markings at a the Brights zoo in Limestone , Tennessee. The new born giraffe was a solid brown colour. It is believed to be the only solid coloured giraffe on the planet.

A woman with a zoo in her stomach

Thanks to Bob Skinner

Todmorton Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Advertiser, 25 April 1873.

"The woman who fosters a reptile in her stomach is outdone by a lady in Frankfort, Ky., who keeps a small menagerie stowed away in her digestive organs. She lately grew emaciated and awfully voracious at the same time, and finally threw up a dead mouse and a small live alligator. The rest of the collection is anxiously waited for, and her mouth has a resemblance to the door of Noah's ark after the flood."

Frogs hunting sparrows

Indian Daily News July 3rd 1877

"...And what is more curious still, frogs were regularly trained in Abkar`s time to hunt sparrows…"

Lights during the 2023 Morocco earthquake

Strange lights spotted in Morocco earthquake videos may be a phenomenon reported for centuries, scientists say. CNN.COM September 14th, 2023

This was a report of flashes of light seen during the 6.8 magnitude earthquake which hit the Atlas Mountains region of Morocco on September 8th 2023.

Letters to Fate Thanks to Gary Mangiacopra

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ROVING RUG MYSTERY

Dulcie Brown
Fresno, California

You may be interested in my little private mystery. I have seen so much of the unusual during my lifetime that I do not consider this too important, but here it is for what it is worth.

I have an ordinary Axminister type rug with a stiff back, measuring four and a half feet wide by six feet long. I bought it new about five years ago -- and every since I have been unable to keep it where I want it.

Lay it east and west, it travels north. Lay it north and south, it travels west. Reverse it, and still it travel in the same directions. It travels sidewise against the length. I have put it on bare floors and on top of other rugs. It does the same. Place furniture on it, and it travels under the furniture without displacing the objects.

If nobody walks on the rug and if it is not disturbed in any way, still it crawls three to five inches a day. If it gets up against a divan leg or the wall, it pushes gradually until the edge of the rug turns over.

I bow have this rug lying on top of a carpet. I can't pull it across this carpet without rolling it endwise, much less -- because of its stiffness -- push it lengthwise hard enough to make it curl against the wall lengthwise. But it manages to do these things itself and I can't guess why. Cany anybody? No one needs suggest that the slant of the floor has anything to do with it. I have had that rug or all kinds of slants and floors. Wherever it is it always acts the same.

Poplar Hawk Moths mating - photograph by Katarzyna Nurkiewicz in Macclesfield July 2023. © Katarzyna Nurkiewicz.